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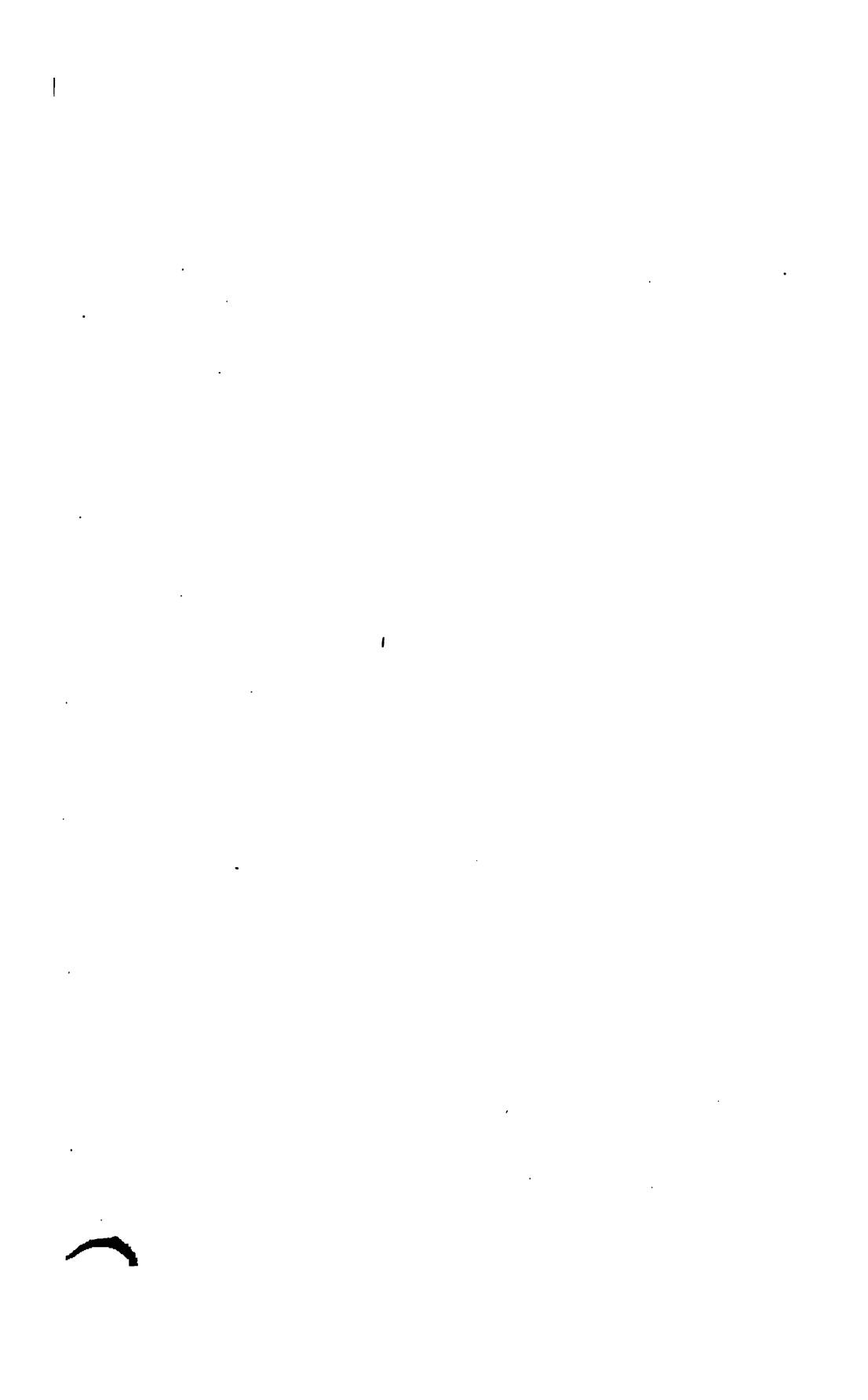
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THE HUMAN TRAGEDY.

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THE
HUMAN TRAGEDY.
A POEM.

BY
ALFRED AUSTIN,
AUTHOR OF "THE SEASON: A SATIRE."

LONDON:
ROBERT HARDWICKE, 192, PICCADILLY.
1862.

280 - a. 11.

THE HUMAN TRAGEDY.

CANTO I.



THE

HUMAN TRAGEDY.

CANTO THE FIRST.

I.

Of continental cities that are known to me,
In this decrepit, money-ridden, crass age,
Although the best of them can scarce atone to me
For the discomforts of a sea-sick passage,
Now that the world's grand sights and sounds
have grown to me
Less sweet than in a younger and more rash
age ;
The one, when there, I hold in least abhorrence,
Is ex-grand-ducal, Arno-girdled Florence.

II.

I give the go-by to Cisalpine cities :
I loathe the Germans, though we call them
cousins.
Spa, Hamburg, Baden-Baden, each but fit is
For feathered fools ; you see 'em by the dozen.
Others there be my pen in passing pities,
Which you may find the Gaul, the Turk, the
Russ in,
Where rogues and dolts of fashion, courting ruin,
Were but too happy to take me or you in.

III.

And as for Switzerland, 'tis well enough
For restless folk insanely fond of climbing,
Who care not if the roads and fare be tough,
Nor seek for names convenient for rhyming.
We all go once : our wives would cut up rough
If we refused that right of early Hymen.
There are not many who repeat the visit ;
The recollection 's not so pleasant—is it ?

IV.

I speak of gentle cities further south,
Where kindly actions done to you no debts are
Where syllables as sweet as rain in drouth
Lisp liquid thanks “per tua gentilezza;”
Where woman’s full-orbed eye and crescent
mouth
Provoke and swift repay the hand that pets
her.
Of these, of which it is so sweet to tell, are
None to compete with Florence, hight *la bella*.

V.

Ferrara bears her sorrows too sedately,
And Genoa now looks scarcely *la superba*;
Bologna, though she burst her fetters lately,
Shows yet the rust of bonds that used to
curb her;
Ravenna sits aloof so cold and stately,
You almost dread with footsteps to disturb her.
She looks as though she never would recover
From the forced touch of her detested lover.

VI.

Rome has its ancient quarter and its modern ;
The one is unromantic, t'other triste ;
And though you see full many a tomb and odd urn,
Busts, statues, halls,—its king is still a priest.
And Naples, though no longer Bourbon-trodden,
Goes on fermenting, just like so much yeast.
I frankly hope they will be independent ;
But neither you nor I can see the end on't.

VII.

And by her Adriatic wave-struck strand,
Venice, like Chryses for his stolen daughter,
Bewails her freedom reft by regal hand,
And prays the Gods to venge her wrongs with
slaughter.
She, too, by Smintheus' crown and sceptre grand
Has sued aloud. *His* failure should have
taught her.
Heaven hears the prayer which could not nations
harrow,
And on their counsels speeds the poisoned arrow.

VIII.

Gods still are crucified, and prophets pelted ;
Prometheus' story ever is repeated ;
By woes like his mankind are slowly melted,
When with the fire he filched they once be
heated.
And Venice, vulture-gnawed and fetter-belted,
Has had her guerdon similarly meted.
She's wept round only by each faithful Nereid—
(Surely by this they must be almost blear-eyed).

IX.

I know that nearer home is a metropolis,
By wealth adored, by coquetry and fashion,
Where ruler after ruler apt to topple is,
Unless he humour for display the passion.
(Save that the fear of loitering an estoppel is,
I much should like to halt and lay the lash
on !)
But if like me you scarcely have a rap at all,
You'll Paris find a cursed expensive capital.

X.

Now Florence, always cheap, is never nasty,
But gives you everything for love or money :
Its caffè nero, cioccolate, paste,
Gelati, sorbets, luscious are and funny.
Its wines are many—I prefer its Asti—
Some rough and sharp, whilst others sweet as
honey.
A traveller will tell you, if you press him, he
Can breakfast bravely for a few centessimi.

XI.

Its other merits you shall hear of later.
But when I last approached it, they were
burying
A poet, struck by Death the desolator.
And crowds to Santa Croce, sad, were hurrying,
Whose sepulchres sublime make great men greater.
They had not, like some folks I know, been
worrying
Him honoured late. They all along did love him,
And now their tears fell honestly above him.

XII.

'Chance, some may deem, because I write in metre,
This poet-worship is by me commended.
When life seemed longer, and its guerdons sweeter,
I to such recompense perhaps pretended :
But though my thoughts still couched in measured
feet are,
My care for such, alive or dead, is ended.
I have no side, I fight beneath no banner,
But simple things say in a simple manner.

XIII.

And if I once struck fiercely, being stricken,
'Tis that quick Youth will never suffer tamely,
And frays, when once begun, are apt to thicken,
Whether the blows be deftly hit or lamely.
But I of such encounters 'gin to sicken ;
And hope that all, who fought or ill or
gambely,
May find soft bosoms for their heads to ache on,
And Dixon rehabilitate his Bacon.

XIV.

Progress, says Science, by conflicting forces
Moves, and along the lines of least resistance.
That conflict therefore must exist, of course is,
And doth not need demonstrative insistence.
So each one shouts and tuzzles till he hoarse is,
Maintaining his to be the shortest distance.
The line that matters take, God's Grand Resultant,
Compound of all, is none's—howe'er exultant.

XV.

But if, disgusted, each should turn philosopher,
Because they take not quite *his* wished direc-
tion,
And come to deem it nothing but a loss of air
To try to bring his neighbours in subjection;
And, as for Nature, should not care a toss if her
Whim should essay some other conic section,
We soon should reach, like folks 'neath Pacha
Ibrahim,
That dreaded state, a stable equilibrium.

xvi.

So may there long be zealous men to quarrel,
Till every difference on earth be settled !
Only if, unexpectedly, some spar ill
And get well beaten, let not these be nettled,
But bide the turn of Fate's revolving barrel.
When first the lists we enter, fresh and
mettled,
We care not if our foes or love or hate us—
But as for me, I'm *rude jam donatus*.

xvii.

But 'tis high time that I commence my story,
Which, though so long, perhaps *too* long, kept
waiting,
Think not, most patient readers, I implore ye,
That I have any slackness in narrating.
For though nor supernatural nor gory,
Nor like the melodrames indulged of late in,
My tale, as simple as a tale of old,
I deem, withal, the saddest ever told.

XVIII.

Not mine to lead you through perplexing maze
Of marriage, crim. con., murder, and elope-
ment;
Nor will you see, with terrified amaze,
A gallant lover leap from base to copement.
All tales like these in millions—(the phrase
Is literally, not by way of trope, meant)—
Unless the book papistical or lewd is,
Ye may, who list, procure at once from Mudie's.

XIX.

I spoke of Florence. 'Tis my story's goal.
But its commencement is in England, where
Men are, I think, the noblest on the whole,
And women the most loving and most fair.
I make no mystery. I shall unroll
The tangled fortunes of a wedded pair
And one unwedded. These unaided three
Themselves evolve The Human Tragedy.

xx.

I rate but meanly retrospective poets,
Who furbish up the dead with living drapery,
Who seem to fancy Art can never show its
Effects unless through distance dim and
vapoury.

Your neighbour who so freely drank of Moet's,
And hostess, spotless as her woven napery,
Could tell a story that would fit as well in
Skilled verse as that of Paris and of Helen.

xxi.

And if in telling this my modern tale
I lend an easy pen to each distraction,
And now the comic, serious now prevail,
It is that Life of Thought no less than Action
Consists, and notes of joy and notes of wail
Are governed by repulsion and attraction.
I only wish my verse to fling around it
Reflex of Life, exactly as I've found it.

XXII.

Papists had long been freed from disabilities,
And ten-pound holders long obtained the
franchise,
And in the House bucolic notabilities,
With narrow views, broad acres, broader
haunches,
Had ceased at last to murmur what an ill it is
At future possibilities to launch eyes,
And, in their hearts though thinking her an
ogress,
“As to the manner born,” harangued on Pro-
gress.

XXIII.

And Radicals, at loss for sores political
On which to try some superficial nostrum,
Went vaguely shouting that the times were critical,
To gaping clowns around provincial rostrum,
But had foregone their ravings hypocritical
About the length of Parliamentary lustrum,
And even almost granted that the Ballot
Was, on the whole, a matter of the palate;

xxiv.

And Whigs between these two approaching stools,
Had tumbled to the ground 'mid scornful
laughter ;
And, having fought like gods tho' led like fools,
Sevastopol our troops had entered (after
Our foes had left) by scientific rules,
And found burst guns, sunk ships, and smok-
ing rafter ;—
In brief, not long ago, but quite of late,
My hero entered upon man's estate.

xxv.

Perhaps I should not designate him hero,
Since heroes surely should do things heroic,
And he did none. At first, a social zero ;
Then, some time, lover ; and at last, a stoic.
And heroes have we plenty, in a free row
From false-haired dandy down to scalping
Mohawk,
And every grade between : some lower, higher
some,
But all infernally worn-out and tiresome.

XXVI.

I've lately come to think the only histories
Worth writing—at least, reading—ne'er are
written,
For though your confidant your very sister is,
You don't care telling how you have been bitten.
And triumphs—saving those that should be
mysteries,
No grateful conqueror would write a fytte on—
Are deadly dull. *Est dulce et decorum*
To fight and die for friends—but not to bore 'em.

XXVII.

A very learned man and very saintly,
One Alban Butler, now among the dead,
Has written rather lengthily, but quaintly,
A Book that you, I'll wager, never read :
“Lives of the Saints.” I still can hear, though
faintly,
Its pages echoing from my schooldays sped.
'Twas always read aloud through Sunday dinners.
Will no one write for us the Lives of Sinners ?

XXVIII.

Gods ! how the book would sell ! The first
edition

Would, ere a week elapsed, be out of print.
Of course, I'd take a copy ; with permission,
Would give its Editor a useful hint :
Which (underneath the rose) would be "con-
trition,

After long sinning, throw in without stint."
The British Public dearly loves a scoundrel,
If, in the end, he weepeth like a drowned rill :

XXIX.

But will not have him otherwise. . . But verily,
I think I never shall commence my story.
I feel acutely under a just slur I lie ;
And though I am not fool enough to bore ye,
And know this babble runneth pretty merrily,
Yet Time, with his severe *memento mori*,
Would not, unfinished, place beneath a cope us,
Like Michael Angelo's "Postremum Opus."



xxx.

Well then—my hero or my sinner—be it
Whichever you prefer, and (if you think)
puppy,—
Entered on man's estate, but nought else, D it!
(You see I never swear except by syncope).
Some are born rich: the Gods did not decree it
In his case. For, in sooth, nor gold nor tin
cup he
Was born nor yet presented with. His chattels
Were only Life, and Life's abounding battles.

xxxI.

But with all these was given a capacity
To fight, when needed. He, withal, so gentle,
That folks not otherwise pronounced him, *tacitè*,
A dreaming fool, unskilful, sentimental.
The truth was this, that though his soul's ra-
pacity
Seized on all feelings, yet he did not vent all;
But when abstracted, silent, many a moment,
Was wondering what Life and all its show meant.

XXXII.

In fact, he was a genius ? Well, he was.

A title arrogant that need offend none ;
Since it was his—*sicut meus est mos*—

To start full many a scheme and yet to end
none ;

Which ever in his brain, between the laws

Of rest perplexed and action, as a dunned nun
Now gazing through, now rapt within her grating,
Went on and on infirmly oscillating.

XXXIII.

And yet there circled a conviction quiet

'Mong close observers that this Hubert
Wardour,

If but the world's affairs again ran riot,

Would in the tumult buffet, and none harder ;
That there was that within him, would he try it,
Could rid the Earth of many blots which
marred her.

They were but few who fancied so : but these
Ranked him among “ Posterity's Trustees.”

xxxiv.

A bad look-out 'twould be for poor Posterity
If its trustees should all turn out as *he* did.
For, whatsoe'er his powers might be, the worrit he
Could never brook of seeing, howe'er needed,
After its interests. And did others stir it, he
A sunset rendezvous, or dinner pleaded.
“*A parti carré* at the Café Riche is
Pleasant—but don’t torment me with my species.”

xxxv.

So would he say in moments confidential,
When wine had cunningly unhinged his tongue:
For wine has a deft potency to wrench all
The heart’s tight secrets both from old and
young.
That this *his* secret was is scarce potential;
Except that was (Life’s unseen rubs among)
His heart in holes as from the wash when socks
come,
He must have been a most consummate coxcomb.

xxxvi.

But whether coxcomb, gourmet, fool, or Timon,
A fact it is that women mostly loved him
Not that for *him* they broke the bonds of
Hymen,
But on a pinnacle at least had shov'd him
I wish I honestly could say that I'm on.
He might have been an antelope or dove dim—
—Eyed and most gaily purfled they had netted,
To see the silly way that he was petted.

xxxvii.

For what do women love us ? Sweetest slippers
They give us for our sermon : for our poem
Most lavish praise—altho' I know they skip us :—
And for a grand oration they have no hymn
Too loud ; but oh ! they never love and lip us
For these, with that full phrenzied warmth they
show him
Who, in soft indolence bedrowsed and drunken,
Down to their own effeminate depths hath sunken !

xxxviii.

So low as this could Hubert never sink :
 But a soft hand caressant in his hair
Or foot on his bewitched him still to think
Was nought in life of worth save what was fair.
 And so these fays with flower-woven link
On link flow'r-woven, in their treacherous lair
Bound fast a soul whose voice, if ever thunder-
 ing,
Had 'chance scared Hell, and set the World
awondering.

xxxix.

Here, once for all, I enter must my protest
 Against the charge that I think ill of women ;
Since neither here nor elsewhere the remotest
 Scheme have I had save that of truly limning
What in the world I deem amiss. Thou dostest
 Dost thou conceive that there is other whim in
A style that hath nor claimeth other merit
Beyond to vermin that of acting ferret.

XL.

I leave to journalist and petted parson
To play the easy pleasant part of optimist;
To tell you 'tis all right, the while you farce on
In a remunerative game, you've propped him
'midst.
But *I*, a speculative, unpaid garçon,
The world's inconsequential antics dropped
amidst,
Beg leave to tell you that your *laissez-aller*
Is worse than pitch-and-toss, or old Aunt Sally.

XLI.

We are all wrong together. That's the simple
Unpleasant statement of a silenced fact.
Who blames a pretty woman with a dimple
Or roguish chin for letting it be smacked?
And yet methinks her needle, bodkin, thimble
Should flash to arms, to see her thus attacked.
On all such heartless, pert, insulting flattery,
Her eyes should scowl defiance like a battery.

XLII.

Some do, you say ? Perhaps they do, although I,
 In frolic, days for *my* part never found it so :
And tho' in this staid period nothing know I,
 I heard a tale yestreen that scarcely sounded so.
Nor did I marvel. Sleek, and lithe, and showy,
 Fair forms this day whirled past me, and
 abounded so
In carnal gauds and nets, I nowise doubted
They went to snare their prey, or else they pouted.

XLIII.

Them do I blame not, more than maids Circassian.
These, harem-guarded, have a notion shrewd
Their only value is for others' passion ;
 So to this notion settles down their mood.
But not they only suffer for this fashion,
 Which hence requires and rears a eunuch
 brood.
When of the one the free-born rights you smother,
You dare not leave full manhood to the other.

XLIV.

And so despite its gracious-seeming lists
Of husbands, wives, and gentles unattached,
Our well-behaved society consists
Of fools and flirts and brigands right well
matched.

Until you give the second freer wrists
And larger aims, the first will still be scratched ;
The third, enticed, aggressive, pity neither,
And hurt themselves more mortally than either;

XLV.

And so the Race's progress be impeded.
This is my Sermon. And if this your anger
Moveth, most moral critics, I shall heed it
Not more than belfry's or than bedlam's
clangour.

My verse is meant, however you may read it,
To be the Woman's champion, and harangue
her
Upon her power withheld and scarce demanded
To launch anew a World that's well nigh stranded.

XLVI.

From the hard fastnesses of March, unwonted,
Winter on April's territory sallied :
Her plains defenceless insolently hunted ;
Then, down encamping, made his daring valid.
And when indulgent May prepared, affronted,
Ambassadors, bright-robed, but scared and
pallid,
He rushed, incontinent, across her border,
Seized on her sacred heralds and o'erawed her.

XLVII.

Nor till the last days of the month of Mary,
His white tents folding, did the brusque
intruder
Shriek wild retreat unto his northern eyrie.
Then did the Year, though joyful tears bedewed
her,
Yet for a little while, alarmed and wary,
Resist all influences sweet that sued her :
Till June came, confident, and showed our gaze
Fruits of the mother's sacred, silent days.

XLVIII.

For then the land burst, bounteous, all abloom,
Now that her painful fetters were undone ;
Rushed into random ecstasies : the plume
The courtly lilac tosses i' the sun,
Laburnum tassels dripping faint perfume,
Thorn, late fruit-blossoms, showed not one by
one,
But all in simultaneous array
Blent with green leaves, as long delayed as they.

XLIX.

And all throughout the air a swimming sense
Of a rich dreamy swoon, with sweets o'erladen,
Of life too conscious made, and too intense
With the swift advent of oppressive Aiden ;
Bewilderment of beauty, affluence
Such as delights, though dangerous, boy and
maiden.
And then it was, by God's conceding grace,
Hubert first gazed on Mary's form and face.

L.

Safe, through a world unsafe, intact, she floated,
Where arms impassionedly were stretched to
clutch her :
Of all the tongues which spake the hearts that
doted
Vainly, not one was ever raised to smutch her ;
Though all could see was *that* in her denoted
Large love in store for him whoe'er shall touch
her.
He had not come. So 'neath her father's roof
She lived, most loved, most courted, but aloof.

LI.

Aloof in all which makes existence Life,
At least in women and in nobler men ;
Aloof in heart and the heart's honest strife.
But for the rest, like others; now and then
You met her in the haunts where sports are rife,
At dinners, balls, nor shrinking from the ken
Of larger multitudes at concerts, races,
Reviews, and cricket-grounds, and such-like places.

LII.

Indeed, I don't pretend she was superior
To other girls to whom you may be partial.
She ne'er was honoured with a "call interior,"
Nor could she turn an epigram of Martial.
Science did often puzzle, sermons weary her.
She hated needlework ; nor did she starch all
Her own fine linen, nor with night-schools busied
her :
Nor was she, I believe, a district visitor.

LIII.

She played—a little ; and she sang—but less ;
In neither won distinction : could not patter
all
The European languages, nor guess
Which were the parent stocks and which col-
lateral ;
In water-colours painted, I confess.
Yet 't could not be for this alone that at her all
Men pushed and pulled, to make her look benignly
At every ball ; but then—she danced divinely.

LIV.

No : as I said, her chief peculiarity
Was, to be ever courted, never won :
Which you will surely own 's a mighty rarity
Under our daily marriage-making sun.
Withal, about her was that gracious charity
Which, blameless as she was, led many a one
To think at first, poor miserable sinner,
Whoe'er could not, that he at least could win
her.

LV.

What was't which made so oddly inaccessible
A girl who claim'd no superhuman merit ?
Whose heart, beyond a question, was impressible,
Though none who strove could find the way to
stir it.
Is't that the deeper natures are far less able
To flaunt the vaster treasures they inherit ?
Who plunge will often to the surface strive
Back, empty-handed, but—it needs to dive.

LVI.

And none had dived, because indeed to most
men
Diving in female depths is awkward swim-
ming :
For howsoever they may loudly boast, men
Know just about as much of quiet women
As, of the letters which they carry, postmen ;
And in their vanity are little dreaming,
When such accept a matrimonial fetter,
It is from lack of other or of better.

LVII.

Why, in the flush of this insurgent summer,
A boy or almost, indolent and vacant
And scarce accredited, a mere new-comer,
Should so assuage her, to all else implacant,
As in an afternoon to overcome her
To his society alone, I say can't :—
This only : that, all diving long before,
Hubert loved Mary, Mary Hubert more.

LVIII.

But Love, indeed, makes swift but sure induc-
tions

From facts invisible, and never errs :
Through all perplexities and gross obstruc-
tions

Which feebler step entangle—trip—like furze,
Unfaltering strides : divines unguessed construc-
tions

In the heart's puzzling text : foresees, avers,
Like Genius, truths her eyes alone which move,
And which she leaves to patient time to prove.

LIX.

Apart from metaphysical analysis—

They saw, and loved each other at first sight.
And he, who to this simple statement callous is,
May labour, if it please him, day and night,
And will but flounder in successive fallacies.

This is the only Truth. Who love aright,
And they alone, have power to drop the plummet
Into Life's depths, of Life to touch the summit.

LX.

And though in unemployed, long after-days,
Hubert his bitter fortunes might embitter
By dwelling on her sweet indulgent ways,
And Mary, when a sad and lonely sitter,
Might deem, with pious retrospective gaze,
Her stature for his greatness did unfit her,
They probed each other's value when, at first,
They loved their best, and little dreamed their
worst.

LXI.

Oh ! why is Love permitted thus to wander—
Love, frank, unwarned — amid a world en-
tangled ?
Why—why not circumscribed within those grander
Unfallen Spheres with which the skies are
spangled ?
Is there *no* Star where souls may safely squander
Their affluent fondness ? Where all else is
jangled,
Why leave *one* note, attunèd to the skies,
To vex an Earth which cannot harmonize ?

LXII.

We well could do without. And what have
our

Clandestine hates, necessitous desires,
Life's cruel logic, ambuscades for power,
Our sweating strain for self that never tires—
Say, what have these to do with this pale
flower,

This delicate stranger from celestial quires ?
Re-claim him, Heaven ! In pity, take him home !
Who sent this poor untended babe to roam ?

LXIII.

It is not decent. Would you take a child,
A young boy innocent, where deep in night
Drunkards troll out their choruses defiled ?
Or would you lure a virgin in her white
And fleckless robes, where, blasphemously wild,
A troop of purple harlots scold and fight ?
Then take this tender one, this Love, away
From a foul world : he must not, cannot stay.

LXIV.

Yet, while the summer days were long and
pleasant
And treacherous opportunity complied,
And, miraged in an atmosphere caressant,
Man's dwelling-place, their home, seemed
deified ;
By no rude cross alarmed, their candour lessened
By no gross circumstance, from Hubert's side
Never moved Mary, never he from her—
Love, sole companion and interpreter.

LXV.

And over silent sward, and underneath
Pendulous trees, and onwards to the sweeter
Dense-foliaged bosks where jealous branches .
wreathe
For amorous intercourse a refuge meeter,
Where even thoughtless airs forbear to breathe,
But the fleet hours are pitilessly fleeter ;
Or where, more lonely, wailing as it went,
Like a boy-poet's dreamy discontent,

LXVI.

Moss-buried runnel fretful music made,
Eager for broader future ; and along
The freer streamlet, till the rash cascade
Bounded adown the cataract, would-be strong ;
Thence by the lake's mild margin that delayed
Its foward petulance ; and by the song
Of river wild with its enfranchisement,
Hubert and Mary, solitary, went.

LXVII.

The past was quite shut out. She owned no
more
Her lonely sense, his degradation, he.
Mary had ne'er Love's mysteries known before,
And Hubert, save in saddest travestie.
They turned their new-found wonder o'er and
o'er,
Which seemed so large, yet less could never be :
Sweetly bewildered, Love's initial rites
With awe attempted, simple neophytes.

LXVIII.

Nor thought of more. Ah ! well for them, for all,
Could they with learning of the porch be sated,
Nor, further craving, face the ills which pall,
With 'biding gloom, upon the Initiated.
And yet, once loving, hearts must prove and
fall,
Or else not proving, aye be separated.
Severe alternative ! which drives us on
Not to forego, or grasp and find it—gone !

LXIX.

And so we grasp and find. Yet he were wise,
Could such one be, courageous to forego.
For, ever in the after-times would rise,
When days were désolate, nights vexed with
woe,
A spirit clothéd in celestial guise,
With gaze unfaltering, footfall faint and slow,
And through the gloom afloating, softest palm
Lay on unrestful brows and leave them calm.

LXX.

Oh ! when, despite a feverish might-have-been,

A man can face his spectral Past, and vaunt
One sacred was-not, neither stroke nor spleen
Of unkind jealous time, nor shadows gaunt
Of darkening days approaching, him serene
In that remembered sacrifice can daunt.
One “following the Lamb” shall Life entreat
For him, who spared *her*, at the Judgment-seat.

LXXI.

No thoughts akin to these as yet perplexed
The two dim souls on-moving to their fate.
Cheeks nearer drawn o'er some magnetic text,
Hand at a rural stile or churlish gate
Given in courtesy, but till the next
With more than courtesy retained, and
prate

Which dipped into the inner life, were all
That proved them heritors of Adam's Fall.

LXXII.

But summer days will pass, and sweetest stories
That ever with the sweetest verse were wreathed
Will creep to close ; and multitudinous glories
Of wood, and glade, and runnel meadow-
sheathed,
And all that holds a mystic witchery o'er us,
Die and to memory only be bequeathed;
And linkéd hands, at parting's stubborn knell,
Relax, and wave irresolute farewell.

LXXIII.

- And by a porch impatient coursers paw :
And nearer swell admonitory feet.
Spurred by the desperate hour, released from
awe
By sickening sense of parting, sudden meet,
All strangers hitherto, their lips, and draw
A draught of love so mutual, so complete,
They feel that, voided of the common air,
Their lips must linger, glued for ever there.

LXXIV.

A moment only : but such moments are,
Then and for evermore, eternities.
Closer the feet—upon the door ajar
Intrusive hand ; from just-discovered bliss
Their lips they wrench asunder. . . Faint and
far,
O'er gravel-walk, o'er further highway, is
Lengthened the fragile link of sounding wheel :
Then, hush ; then, twilight. Then, Night's
silent seal.

LXXV.

Some six weeks later, Hubert, then in Town,
One morning, lazy, crapulous, abed
Received his letters ; careless, laid them down :
Save one, from Mary. This he oped and
read.
“ I write you, to anticipate renown ;
I am engaged, and shortly shall be wed.
I mean to be most happy. Wish me joy ;
So shall my future be without alloy.”

LXXVI.

“ You ask for my good wishes : ” he replied.
(For *me*, I think what Goethe says is right.)
If wish of mine can happiness provide,
 Your matrimonial future will be bright.
But if that future closely be allied
 With others’ wishes, ‘tis in sorry plight.”
He closed, and shrugged his shoulders : “ No-
thing in her :
So much for that : ” posted, and went to
dinner.

LXXVII.

Who first taught letters to a captive maid
 Or banished lover was a treacherous tutor,
Whatever Eloise in “ awful shade,”
 Might think when ravished of her winsome
 suitor.
Words tender by the voice’s subtle aid
 More tender sound, but harsh ones even
 mutter ;
Whilst written sweetneses are somewhat sickly,
And hard cold letters not forgotten quickly.

LXXVIII.

And even when the twain are Love's apprentices,
Young, credulous, impatient, sentimental,
Of whom, in sooth, the number told by twenties is,

Writing, they soon discover they have spent all
The wealth of words that for such purpose lent
us is :

Then must they language send less fond and
gentle,

Or write *da capo*, “ darling,” o'er and o'er,
Until the very thing becomes a bore.

LXXIX.

They say that Trade's incalculable currency
Is by but trifling bullion represented,
And but by credits and such-like deterrents, he
From being straight insolvent is prevented.

Love also speculates : a kin occurrence he
Would meet if all *his* paper were presented.

I blush to say he kiteflies. Not a few
Of his long bills dishonoured are, when due.

LXXX.

But I digress: for I am only sorry
That Love in letters soon exhausts his tether;
And wiser folks, when life is all a-maying,
Reserve some tender word for sterner weather:
That amorous language is but children's-playing
Save lip and look, and fondlings go together,
And but provokes a morbid state or laugh:—
You might as well make love by telegraph.

LXXXI.

Withal, in absence likely to be long
It is not easy to be silent quite;
And Hubert, from the softly-scribbling throng
Averse as any, could not help but write.
Scarce, lovingly. Their strolls the woods among
And frequent sweet coy-courtesies despite.
Save in their lips' last—first—insane compres-
sion
They had not uttered aught of Love's confes-
sion.

LXXXII.

And he had been so spoiled and fooled and petted,
And had so petted, fooled, and spoiled in turn,
Liked, left, or lost, and losing not regretted,
That Love the true from counterfeit discern
At once he could not. Love the true had netted
Its prey at last. But we are slow to learn.
And so he, unsuspecting of the shore,
Nibbled, as oft he nibbled had before.

LXXXIII.

And yet he should have known. In what flirtation,
Remote or recent, fleeting or protracted,
Had he e'er shown that distant hesitation
With which he had of late so strangely acted ?
He knew that confidence, in every station,
Wins women best : I cannot say he lacked it.
Whene'er he wished to flirt, he quickly did it : he
Was certainly not noted for timidity.

LXXXIV.

O cursëd after-wisdom, which displays
 In glaring light our then-clandestine folly !
What though success befool our heads with bays,
 Or failure steep in wassail, veil with holly
Our tell-tale brows, there doggeth all our ways
 Persistent, retrospective melancholy,
Making more bitter e'en the bitterest lot
 With “ Fool ! it *might* have been and—it is
 not ! ”

LXXXV.

And though a deeper wisdom reassures us
 That whatsoever is could not be different,
Such stern philosophy in nowise cures us,
 Of pangs by which the strong and proud and
 stiff are rent.
And though a bearing insolent immures us,
 And we ascribe our ailments to a liver rent,
We know that, worse than rustics, we sate by
 And watched the river run till—it was dry.

LXXXVI.

So was't with Hubert. He, as idly sitting,
Saw life beside him pleasantly aflowing,
Deeming it ne'er could cease to flow, not witting
That at the very moment it was going
Past him beyond redemption ; that the fitting
Time now was here for him to plunge, and
throwing
Self i' the stream, to trust the inviting tide,
With it commingled and identified.

LXXXVII.

After that strange farewell, *en route* to Town,
He sighed to think upon his empty coffer.
Really, she *was* :—but then, without a crown,
'Twould monstrous be to make the girl an offer.
But oh ! that kiss ! and oh ! those tresses brown !
And oh ! — absurd. Then, suddenly turned
scoffer :
“ Time and the lording Fates have more to do
with it
Than I, and so perhaps will see me through with it.

LXXXVIII.

“ If not, *vogue la galère.*” And so he wrote,
In the six weeks, three letters, answered duly,
Which did, though chance not clearly, yet denote
This state of mind. But, whether wise or
fool, he
No proof displayed that, absent, he did dote
On lips that, present, he had kissed so truly.
The letters, I am positive, perplexed her;
Much, too, mefears, poor wildered pet, they vexed
her.

LXXXIX.

Her answers were of much the same complexion
As his: made up of query, wish, and doubt.
Anxious to hide, yet wishful for detection,
And with a sure significance throughout.
Hinting the trouble of a stirred affection,
Anger suppressed, a written sort of pout;
As though she could not the remembrance
smother
Of that warm kiss, excepting with another.

XC.

She was not near to give it: so, instead,
Came letters dubious, lacking warmth and
life.

Then on her rushed, suffusing soul and face,
Self setting with intenser self at strife,
Remembrance of that furious embrace
Such as transforms to all but wedded wife
A bosom truly maiden; incompleted,
Leaves a reproach through life, profoundly seated.

XCI.

O purity of women who are pure!
To speak it is to soil it! Sudden pledge,
At moment when no surety can be sure,
Had she bestowed, by horrid parting's ledge.
Should that betrothal hasty not endure?
Would she were lying underneath the sedge,
Strolled-past with him whom she, unkissed before,
Too much had given, should she give no
more!

XCII.

And stronger waxed within her conscious soul
This demon horror, till, whene'er she walked
By grassy undulation, tufted knoll,
Concealing hedgerow where the slender-stalked
Convolvuli peeped out, or by the bole
Of weathered ash where she had sate and
talked
With him the afternoons away, it stepped
Close by her side till, terrified, she wept.

XCIII.

And when the Night from her dark loosened
tresses
Would o'er the earth invisible spices shake,
What time her subtle sister, Slumber, presses
Consenting lids, would Mary, still awake,
Bent o'er the letters, with unstable guesses
At their fixed meaning, aggravate her ache;
Then, marble, keep her casement, with her eye
lent
Unto the stars, that glistened but were silent.

XCIV.

But when the hush was very deep, and o'er
All the drowsed world the slumberous film
had floated,
The trouble in her breast would rise and pour
Out melody, low, vague, and broken-throated,
As to sick babe a nurse of simple lore,
Or to itself a mind that strayed and doted.
But the wild words nor nurse nor mind unstrung
Were like to know: and these the words she
sung.

Will the Sun never set?
Will the twilight never fade?
My heart is sick, my eyes are wet
With the night and his step delayed.
Go, loitering light, from the west!
Sink, floating light, in the stream!
Fold, breeze, thy pinions and rest!
Rest: sleep; and dream!

The twilight lingers still.
I hate the hues on the hill;
I hate the sundown streak.
Oh! if I could but wreak
On saffron crag, on crimson peak
My baffled will.

Oh! come to me, silent as stars!
Come to me, soft as the dew!
Come as the light through my bars
When moons are new.
But come, come, come,
My own, my sweet, my true!

Oh! come!
I have flung the lattice wide
That the tendrils of the vine
May guide your arms as they climb and glide
Nearer up to mine.
Come, come, come!
I cannot be mute, be dumb—
For I pine—I pine—I pine!

Hush ! it is he. I heard
A murmur shake the balanced air.
Ah no ! the Night but stirred
In mental prayer.

I cannot await him longer.
Love, ruffled against delay,
A moment, fiercer, stronger,
Beats—flutters—faints away.

XCV.

No answer came the silver distance over.
Perhaps the breath of roses blushing deeper,
Perhaps a heaving in the stifled clover
Of yon deep meadow, or eaves-dropping creeper
Close at her lattice, murmured : but no rover
Adventurous in love appeared, to steep her
In blushes for the over-heard warm cadence
Of song all too tumultuous for a maiden's.

XCVI.

O purity of women who are pure !
They know and yet they know not. In their
breast
A restless fearsome secret they immure,
Which to themselves is never all confessed ;
But oft, withal, like to a seeming lure,
Perplexing even those who know them best,
Escapes in random converse, ditties dubious,
Or praise of poems somewhat insalubrious.

XCVII.

They are like children playing on the beach
Of a mysterious ocean ; fascinated
So by the terror it inspires, that preach
As mother-instinct may, their steps elated
Will trespass where the faint foam-fringes
reach.
Cometh, asudden, wave precipitated
By the dread sea they toy with. How they
scamper !
Happy ! if not with feet and spirits damper.

xcviii.

Shakspeare to man allotteth seven ages.

Woman, less versatile, can claim but three.

I read the notion in a Frenchman's pages—

Whose, I forget, but—'tis not due to me,
Who do not want another workman's wages.

But this is what he says; and *I* agree:
Firstly, she dreams of Love; then, gives and
gets it:

And thirdly, ever afterwards regrets it.

xcix.

At present, Mary singularly blended

These three successive epochs all in one.

Her dream of Love was certainly not ended,

Yet its reality (she deemed) begun:

And now—which not at all the matter mended—

Did she commence to fear it all but done.

Regret will wax to hate, when rank in growth:

Such, hers. For self? for Hubert?—'Chance, for
both.

C.

Poor child ! she knew not : only, that her heart
Was nigh to breaking, with this double doubt.
O yes ! he loved her ! What ! he played a part
When, as they watched the timid stars come out,
His voice had trembled so ? Despite the smart
Of those cold letters hurting as the knout
Of rude taskmaster, still the lingering quiver
Of that warm kiss was earnest of the giver.

CL.

Yet, if he did *not* love her !—If he toyed,
A truant time, a truant summer time,
With her most summer presence : if she buoyed
Her heart's high hopes on a heart sunk in
slime !
What, if he trifled ! if the lips enjoyed
Were as forgotten as a kissing rhyme !
Where were *his* now ? . . . Well—she too could
forget,
She too . . . But no ! she hung on him . . . And
yet . . !

CII.

Ah me ! God help her ! . . . Just before the days
When Hubert on her quiet did intrude,
Had gaily flickered in her careless rays,
'Mid other motes with like conceit imbued,
One who, though larger, motelike seemed to raise
His motions towards the centre of their good.
She gave that gaze which fitting to a mote is ;
Which means—she did not take the slightest
notice.

CIII.

But if *she* didn't, there were those who did.
For this Sir Gilbert was a wealthy Baronet,
Whose origin as ancient was and hid
As oriental feud of Druse and Maronite,
And love of titles is not easy chid,
However much you wags may wage your war
on it.
All have some one advantage : 'tis but fair :
He's rich, I'm young, and you—have chestnut
hair.

CIV.

So are we quits . . Now, Mary's father, who
Adored his daughter, when he was not busy,
Had seen no suitor who he thought would do ;
But when he saw Sir Gilbert, said "this is
he!"

And when his daughter did not think so too,
Deemed her coquettish, obstinate, or dizzy ;
Entreated—scolded—petted ; blamed a vain age,
And then—departed to inspect his drainage.

CV.

Her mother was a very worthy person,
Who never in the course of half her life
Had entertained or prompted an aversion :
The kindest mother and the truest wife.
She liked Sir Gilbert : there was no aspersion
Upon his fame ; the country-side was rife
With his good nature, hunters, drag, and
carriage—
In fact the very creature for a marriage.

CVI.

I am withal obliged to say in candour,
She had to Hubert shown uncommon preference.

He, naturally courteous, would hand her
To couch or carriage, with a gracious deference
Which I regret to say youths rarely squander
On those who have best claim to youthful
reverence.

Politeness makes no "fair exchange" with beauty,
And Courtesy should always be "on duty."

CVII.

She was not busied like her active spouse
With poachers, swedes, fat stock, and quarter-session.

And so whilst Mary under shady boughs
With Hubert parlied, waxed the vague impression

That comprehended yearnings, silent vows,
Such as would baulk all later intercession,
Were subtly interchanged. So, when he went,
Though "come again" she said, felt more content.

CVIII.

But when no longer, lazily, the lawn
His shadow sweeping, Mary's shadow still,
But slower than its wont, was ever drawn
Across the grass where they had drunk their
fill
Of unshared converse, and nor eve nor dawn,
Nor even sunny noon, which cleared the hill
Of fleeciest clouds, the settled shadow drove
From off her brow, the mother's grew as grave.

CIX.

She blamed herself: she really should have known
How it would be. And yet the time was brief:
Love had not surely so gigantic grown
Within three days that absence was a grief?
Herself, she liked him vastly, she must own:
Of all her favourites, he perhaps the chief.
But then, except that he could house and dress
himself,
He had not got a groat wherewith to bless
himself.

CX.

So, having done a foolish thing, she deemed
She had best do what now appeared a wise one ;
And forthwith to her husband told what seemed
To her to be the case. He oped his eyes : one
Quick “damn it” gave ; then—what need not
surprise one—

Resolved, the while a loving gaze he beamed
On his old port, and cracked his early filbert,
That Mary should be married to Sir Gilbert.

CXI.

He looked for opposition, at the first,
And met with it ; but was not quite prepared
To find her much more tractable than erst.

At length, she grew indifferent : she cared
Little about him : he, nor best nor worst,
But like the rest who passed her life and stared.
Still, if she *must* ? . . if Fate had intercepted
him ?

Why then . . You know, she finally accepted
him.

CXII.

He was indeed a very decent fellow,
Good at a fence, still better at a bottle :
He could not tell the complement of yellow,
Nor learnedly discourse of Aristotle ;
Perhaps he knew that Shakspeare wrote *Othello*,
But could not answer who was Amos Cottle.
Reading he called a “cursed bore,” and shunned
it—
But then a husband need not be a pundit.

CXIII.

He still was young—say, thirty-five, at most—
And had a constitution quite unshattered.
They chronicled his movements in the *Post*,
Daughters discussed him, and their mothers
flattered.
If he a striking person could not boast
Nor bearing very lofty—well, what mattered ?
Conceded, that he wasn’t an Adonis,
He had a very handsome pair of ponies.

CXIV.

You see that there were reasons of the strongest
 Why Mary's parents should approve the suit.
Glad to be saved the horrors of a long guest,
 He was betrothed, and went away to shoot.
He little dreamed to what he owed his con-
 quest ;
That Mary—if her sire had bid her do't—
Had married the first man who passed, or next
 one :
I almost think she would have wed the sexton.

CXV.

But the weeks wore away : the summer waned ;
 And nearer moved the looked-for marriage-
 morn.
Autumn came slowly through the yellow-grained
 Expectant slopes, and took away the corn.
September in the land no more remained
 Of its sweet manifold inducements shorn ;
The harvest-moon now vacant waxed, and idle ;
The next would shine at full on Mary's bridal.

CXVI.

On no such subject musing, from the moors
Of hospitable laird in centre Perth
But just returned, to where reopened sewers,
Gas-pipes exposed, and universal dearth
Of its at other times consoling lures
Made London look the dreariest place on
Earth,
Resolved at once to leave it for another,
Did Hubert hap on Mary and her mother.

CXVII.

The shop from which they suddenly emerged
Plainly bespoke their errand up to Town.
The colour to the maiden's temples surged ;
To Hubert's rose — but quick repressed — a
frown.
The kindly parent farewell visit urged :
It was no distance—could he not run down ?
'Twould quiet be ; but quieter, anon :
For, three weeks more, and Mary would be gone.

CXVIII.

Ne'er was invite more innocently given.
The old suspicion had been banished quite :
For Mary by betrothal's bonds was riven,
And had not Hubert long been lost to sight ?
He, by he knew not what emotion driven,
But grown incautious in his own despite,
Gave to the honest pressure swift consent.
Yes : he would go—on Friday. And he went.

CXIX.

The evening mists had settled as he drew
Up at the porch whence, four brief months
ago,
He from once-tasted lips unwilling flew—
Without one throb of joy, one dream of woe.
Why he had come at all he scarcely knew.
He feared the visit would be deuced slow.
However, he should leave the place on Sunday :
He surely could contrive to get through *one*
day.

CXX.

A duller dinner never was devoured :
The dishes passed, the conversation flagged :
Mary by silent stupor was o'erpowered ;
Dumb were her parents, even Hubert gagged.
The dear old songs and symphonies seemed
soured
Somehow ; and even Time, ungracious, lagged.
Hubert had ne'er so dull been with a girl ; he
Felt much relieved when they retired early.

CXXI.

Dew-dashed but silent, in the first October
Sunlight lay meadow, upland, wood, and pool :
Mid-time delicious, when all hues are sober,
All sounds an undertone, all airs are cool ;
When Nature seems awhile to pause and probe
her
Heart and demand if her eventful rule
Have blessed the land she loves so, and to
brace her
Against the wintry darksome days that face her.

CXXII.

Then side by side and unaccompanied,
But yet for all their nearness more divided
Than if between them swayed an ocean's tide,
Forth through the wonted ways they silent
glided.

It seemed as if the summer life had died
In their hearts too, where it had late resided ;
And Autumn had infused her solemn mood
In them as in the sky, the mere, the wood.

CXXIII.

And as nor song of birds, nor foliage fluttering,
On the air's quiet pensiveness intruded,
But only ever and anon the muttering
Of loosened leaf from branches scarce denuded,
So from their lips, once so profuse in uttering
All love-swayed sounds, at intervals exuded
Unwilling word, a syllable, a sigh,
Stirred by no inspiration, dropped to die.

CXXIV.

At length they halted where a lake hemmed in
By wheeling bank its liberty asserted,
Rushed for a gorge beyond with fretful din,
O'er boulder leaped, through every crevice
spirted,
Scattering its strength, but resolute to win.
Here Mary sate, with countenance averted;
He, midway on the stepping-stones, surveyed
The springing cataract, the crouching maid.

CXXV.

Their silence now seemed natural: the lake
Was silent too, but from its bosom sent,
Not less for their than for its own sad sake,
This infant stream, whose vagrant babble-
ment
Made speech for all: as in oppressive ache
Of those who, suffering, yet would hush lament,
A child's gay talk, irrelevant and quaint,
Acquits the air of silence and restraint.

CXXVI.

So, halting there, though from their lips did steal
 No words in praise of Nature's handiwork,
Such as, when uttered skilfully, reveal
 The deeper meanings that within them lurk;
And though the eye, so potent to repeal
 All past estrangement, did its office shirk,
They felt between them narrower grow the
 distance,
And nearer drawn by some dim sweet insistance.

CXXVII.

Until at length his gaze, that had been wandering
 From lake to her, from her to where the
stream,
Its wrestling done, went—lost and found—
 meandering
Through deep-hushed woods like fancies
 through a dream,
Settled on Her whom Nature, rarely squandering
 Its wealth however vast, withal did seem,
Spendthrift for once, to have profusely dowered
 With every gracious gift that ever flowered.

cxxxviii.

Her head was turned away : her further cheek
Rested upon her hand : he could but see
The nearer tresses, soft and brown and sleek,
The outlines of her form's mild majesty,
Shoulders whose fall a Phidias might wreak
On happy marble—had we such as he—
And just one-half a tiny foot that hinted
Of hidden symmetry where nought was stinted.

cxxxix.

He had not yet had time to front and brace
Himself against the surge of dizzy feeling
With which the sight of too abounding grace,
In youth electric, sets the senses reeling,
Before she turned but quick again her face
Averted. All too late. He saw, astealing
Down it those tears which are at last the
emblem
Of griefs, more real the longer we dissemble
‘em.

CXXX.

Omnipotence of tears in Woman's eyes !

She threatens—and we flaunt the weak pretender :

Cold—and we beat her at her own disguise :

Trusting to scorn, with keener scorn we rend her :

She smiles on others—we disport a prize.

She *still* shall win : she weeps, and we surrender !

Artist ! amend your craft ! with shields nor spears

Sculpture your Venus Victrix, but—in tears !

CXXXI.

A moment, and with hasty step from stone

To stone aleaping Hubert rushed and knelt

By the still form which had his altar grown

In that brief tear-betraying glance, and dealt
Out worship wild, unweighed : “ My sweet, my

own,

My one dear saint, for whom I ever felt,

Since first to see you Fate did me allow,

What was so strange I knew it not till now ! ”

CXXXII.

She leaned away, she hung athwart the ledge
Of the young torrent, and with quivering lips
“Don’t,” she cried, “don’t! My pledge! my
sacred pledge!
Leave me! oh! leave me!” Just as when
light slips,
When day is dying, from the horizon’s edge,
Crept o’er her brow inanimate eclipse.
Then from the near cascade he gently drew her,
And in her night with kisses did bedew her.

CXXXIII.

To these at length she woke, as Day doth wake:
And just as Day, in the first flush of morn,
Flings on the dewdrops parching glance, that
quake
And shrink before the unexpected scorn,
So did she a forbidding presence make
To him, as sudden of his bravery shorn.
Ah me! Days droop, and dewy nights return,
And human hearts must quenched be, if they burn.

cxxxiv.

And soon—how soon!—although the lips forbidden

From their too passionate assault desisted,

A hand, that hinted all the fondness hidden,

With trailer hand was tremulously twisted;

Whilst one, at first withstood, at last unhidden,

Strayed o'er the cheek and o'er the curls
that kissed it.

So, all absorbed, concentrated in this latter act,

Silent, they sate and watched the tumbling
cataract.

cxxxv.

And when at last the silent spell was broken,

“Let us go home,” she said, “’tis better, so.”

But Love’s resistance is a game provoking

Where losers win, as all who play it know.

And so they went, their hands together yoking,

Over the stepping-stones, for weal or woe.

This fancied danger o'er, her hand yet lingered

Captive in his, too feverishly fingered.

CXXXVI.

There was a grotto hard beside the centre
Of the clear lake whose mossy banks they
skirted ;
No cloud in quiet Heaven, on earth no mentor
By whom their erring steps could be diverted.
Was it so strange that they should halt and enter ?
The woods behind from all intrusion girt it :
Before them stretched the open pool pellucid ;
It surely was not odd that they should choose it.

CXXXVII.

And so they chose, or Hubert chose, and Mary,
Leashed to his will, submissive sate beside him.
And when his arm curved round her waist so
fairy,
She had not woman been, had she denied him.
For Love at first assault makes all unwary,
However unassaulted folks deride him.
And when he pressed her to him with a bolder
Fondness, she dropped her head upon his shoulder.

cxxxviii.

And there remained. No word, no look, no sigh
Her frame disturbed. She felt the hour did
offer

Bliss she were well content to take, and die,
Would they but lift life's weary load from off
her.

She did not wish, she did not *think*, to lie
Closer than this to him who ne'er could proffer
More that her love could close with. To secure
it, he

Had but to comprehend her woman's purity.

cxxxix.

He did not fully comprehend it then,
Though later how entirely! But the novel
And suddenly-found fondness, such as men
But rarely feel, forbade his thoughts to grovel.
Transformed to Love's palatial denizen,
He all abjured Lust's customs and its hovel.
And so the form confided to his keeping
Held he as stilly as a babe asleeping.

CXL.

And still as slumberous babe remained she
 leaning
 On the brave breast ennobled by its burthen,
As swooned in sacred speechlessness and gleaning
 Glimpses of things invisible, unearthen :
Till she, grown fretful at protracted weaning
 From features which her love had ta'en its
 birth in,
Felt for his gaze, and found it overflowing
 With fulness it but yearned to be bestowing.

CXLI.

But when she saw the wildness in his look,
 The quick unmastered passion in his eyes
Which sprang at sight of hers, she could not
 brook
 The thought that she should make less good
 and wise
Him, her new, only idol—so betook
 Her head again to her late paradise,
And said in accents simple as a smile:
“Talk to me, Hubert, talk a little while.”

CXLII.

Then may-be just a touch more closely pressing
 Her bent and half-averted form to his,
And stooping o'er the hair he was caressing,
 Which straying now in utter carelessness
Retained a grace beyond or words or guessing,
 He in its warmth buried a warmer kiss :
And having drawn deep inspiration thence,
 Poured back on her his fatal eloquence.

CXLIII.

Love makes us egotists, but deifies
 A vulgar fault. The consecrated being
Whom we have found, must see but with our
 eyes,
Think only with our thoughts, pelt time a-flying
With our pet toys ; and both, through poor dis-
 guise
Of bodies twain, be but one soul agreeing.
So when she sweetly prayed him to discourse
To her, he talked—about himself of course.

CXLIV.

Had he returned from traversing Orion,
Sopped in Arcturus, found the missing Pleiad,
Surged from the streams where lucky satyrs
lie on
Couches arranged by natty-fingered naiad,
Found Orpheus' lute, or sung the songs of Sion,
Worked out the missing link 'twixt man and
dryad,
She had not lent him so bewitched an ear
As now to babble of his dull career.

CXLV.

He talked of life misspent, but in a tone
With so much fluent sadness interfused,
It showed like noble : and when poignant grown
He drew the picture of a Past abused,
And then of one he might have made his own,
She only felt that he himself accused
Indeed most wrongly ; that the penitent near her
Had never sinned, or for his sins was dearer.

CXLVI.

But when his lips, with accents short and hurried,
Gesture that shook her, heart that swayed and
throbbed,
Descanted of a future which was buried
Even as his Past now that of her 'twas robbed,
She turned, she clasped—drooped from—his neck,
and flurried
By his wild words, plunged in his breast and
sobbed :
Whilst he could only stroke her curls' rich russet,
And fret at wrong, and wanton Fate that does it.

CXLVII.

But soon like ripples in some tranquil mere
Rudely disturbed, her heavings died away.
Then from her lips came comfort calm and clear
Even as the lake which hushed before them lay.
She too descried the Future, vineyards near,
Which should redeem the desert of to-day :
A Promised Land which, from its summit high,
Her Love would point—ne'er reach—since it must
die.

CXLVIII.

And then she pointed to the broad Beyond,
Which he might conquer with a freer stride,
Because not fettered by too close a bond
With her dwarfed nature : withal, fortified
By knowing she should ever keep a fond
Gaze on his steps, whatever might betide ;
Even when some one worthier should be gain-
ing
The heart she feared she only was profaning.

CXLIX.

A melancholy wonder smote his face.
His eyes from hers were truant, and looked
out,
But not on flush of foliage nor grace
Of Nature's manifold beauties flung about
With negligence of wealth, but blank on space,
As in a vision tranc'd and devout.
At length, in words significant, though low,
“ *Let us go home,*” he said: “ ‘tis better,
so.”

CL.

So home their way they wended by the lake
Cradled in hushing woods, and by the bolder
Stream whose untutored music shall forsake
Never their ears, till Death shall make them
colder.
And Time, that doth obliterate with ache
And joy more recent joys and achings older,
Owns that one spot still baffles his endeavour,
The spot these twain have made their own for ever.

CLI.

Long lay the shadows on the sleepy lawn
Afront the Hall when from the covert ways
Issuing, their feet magnetically drawn
Sought the soft sward where they, in summer
days
When their untroubled intercourse had dawn,
Exchanged inaugral looks of love and praise.
Now, all was ended. Praise and love were
spoken ;
And hearts, if hearts can ever break, were broken.

CLII.

No longer now as in that tranquil time
Did they in converse' courteous strife engage,
No longer now the shadows of the lime
Fling fuller meaning on a Poet's page,
No longer now authoritative rhyme
Their tread responsive hurry or assuage.
They trailed their footsteps all about the green,
Vagrant, with many a fitful pause between.

CLIII.

And neither led ; but, desultory, one
And now the other paused, or stirred, or
strayed :
But whoso of the twain did seek or shun
This path or that, or halt asudden made,
The other, straight, like shadow i' the sun
Obeying substance, hastened or delayed ;
And which the substance, which the shadow, no
one
Could have divined—so much they seemed to
grow one.

CLIV.

Till on the brim, mid-sward, of tiny basin
Where feathery fountain-sprays fell faintly
tinkling,
And as they fell kept tracing and re-tracing
The broken rain-dome of their fragile sprinkling,
Settling they watched each other's mirrored face in
The dark blue depths the jet-drops scarce
were wrinkling.
Ah ! time was coming when their eyes' affection
Must sated be with still more dim reflection !

CLV.

Once, when he turned to hide recurring frown,
And dipped his hand below the placid water,
She plunged and seized on it as though't would
drown ;
Murmuring with that wild phrenzy that dis-
traught her,
“ Oh ! if we could but drag each other down ! ”
Then, with a sad significance that taught her
More than Love pure as hers unaided sees, he
Answered : “ My darling ! it were but too easy ! ”

CLVI.

So easy—oh ! how easy ! Did ye know,
 Harsh curse-denouncing moralists ! how often
Men whom ye brand as fiends fair forms forego
 That might a seraph's rigid virtue soften,
“And seal their own to spare some” maiden's
 “woe,”
Ye would, methinks, your pulpits perched
 aloft in,
Revise the hasty sentence where you dragged
 Hell in,
And tell us of the Land where dwelleth Mag-
 dal'en.

CLVII.

The muffled mists came trailing up the leas,
 Hemmed in the landscape, front and flank
 and rear.
Huddled the leaves more closely; and the trees
 Drew in their shadows stealthily, for fear.
And as the prospect faded by degrees,
 More plainly plashed the fountain on their ear.
And in their baffled hearts they seemed to hearken
The drip of doom, whilst all around did darken.

CLVIII.

But overhead a single star outstole,
And drew their gaze up through the silver
gloaming :
Outrider of the Night—the first, the sole
Illumined lamp Heaven's ever-deepening dome
in.
Both saw and both were silent ; but each soul
Deemed such the star they fain would find a
home in,
If there they might be borne, and leave no trace,
Athwart the far forbidding interspace.

CLIX.

But when the Night with starry skirmishers
Had scoured the skies and spared no trace
of Day,
And come the hour when, howsoe'er demurs
The spirit, owns withal the flesh its clay,
Then ere they slept—she lingering on the stairs—
He hurrying forward, arms that nought could
stay
Folded around her fiercely, half bereft her
Of life with one long muffled kiss, and left her.

CLX.

Dew-dashed once more and silent in the morn
Lay the apparent woodlands; but not more
Silent and dew-dashed than the eyes forlorn
Of her whose bosom even to the core
Of inmost being ruthlessly was torn.
The Morning mounted, and the moments
wore:
Moments no griefs can hurry or delay—
Save when we scare them with our call to stay.

CLXI.

The tokens of departure met her eyes
And ears bewildered, and upon her rushed
As with the shock of unannounced surprise.
Her consciousness had been too wildly flushed
For her the sober truth to realize
That he was really going; that lives crushed
Are nought to Fate, whose course is not more
even
Over exulting hearts than hearts bereaven.

CLXII.

She realized it, now; and strove to eke
The scant time out with a prolonged Fare-
well.

O paradox of language! when we speak,
Wishing the thing we know impossible
In one poor only word that bubbleth weak
Up through the bosom's gurgitory swell.
Farewell! Farewell! . . . The "Blest" might wish
the same
To the poor "Cursed in everlasting flame!"

CLXIII.

Yet never come the day when Love no more
Can boast its noble high-born martyrs, whom
Nor Time the envious leveller, nor the roar
Nor rabble-rout of circumstance can doom
To soil with craven tears the badge they bore!
But gazing from the scaffold on the tomb,
May they, their vulgar butchers to annoy,
Die with brave words—the mockery of Joy!

CLXIV.

Farewell ! Farewell !...She drew him to a nook
Leafy and sweet with flowers, her winning ways
Had coaxed from summer when He went, and took
From out her breast something that caught
the rays,
Branch-tossed, of sunlight, and with voice that
shook
Said : “Take and wear it in the after-days.”
“Take it ?” he answered : “Yes—as I would do,
A shell, a kingdom—anything from you !”

CLXV.

Then as he stretched once more his arms to fold her
Yet ere he went, her own seemed drawn apart
By timid want that parting had made bolder.
And, tightly clasped, heart violent on heart,
Lips hot and parched conjoined with lips no colder,
Inhaled they passionate breath no ties could
thwart ! .
Kiss bitter-sweet ! though long, withal the last !
The summing-up of the distracted Past !

CLXVI.

Then to the porch returning, where awaited
Emblazoned equipage and frothing bay,
Wonted adieux he took with voice that mated
Ill with the looks, that always will betray.
Harshly the wheels upon the gravel grated,
Drew back a moment and—then dashed away :
Under the branches, through the further gate,
She gazing after, trothed and desolate !

CLXVII.

“I send,” wrote Hubert, “ ’chance a worthless
song,
But one which doth my feelings so express
I nurse the hope it may, without a wrong
To any other, speak your own no less.
If so—I might perhaps be made more strong,
Nor quite so much alone in loneliness
If, keeping lines in which our thoughts are
blended,
You sent a transcript with your name appended.

CLXVIII.

No answer came. A note most kind though
short

He sent, expressing marvel. By return,
Came this reply, or something of the sort.

“They kept your letter from me. How I
burn

(I have been angry — Heaven forgive me
for’t !)

With shame to have to tell you what I
learn

Only to-day. I did assert my freedom,
And send the lines.” . . . Perhaps you’d like to
read ’em ?

Accept it, darling ? Surely—yes :

This ring of diamonds—emeralds too ?

As I would take—no need to press—

A leaf—a crown—from you !

No rudest art, no brightest ore

Could make its value less or more.

In vain I smile. 'Twere useless quite
To tell you that it is not hard
To have one's Paradise in sight,
Withal to be debarred.

And yet the generous glimpse you gave
Was more than once I dared to crave.

Hard, very hard, love! but ordained.
We know 'tis God's own world, at worst.
And, look you, pet! we partly drained
And still we partly thirst:
Whilst others parched remain or seize
Fiercely the cup, and taste the lees.

So let us strive to think it well,
However now we stand aghast:
Earth—Heaven—not being parallel,
Perforce must meet at last.
And in that disembodied clime
A clasp more close may *not* be crime.

We have not wronged him. No : one word
From mine had snatched you from his lips :
One prayer, by passion if preferred,
Had wrought our souls' eclipse.

Thank Heaven ! pure face ! there comes
to-night,
No cloud betwixt our love and Light !

You loved me too well to deny :
I loved you far too well to ask.
Only a kiss, a tear, a sigh,
A look—and then a mask !

We spared the Fruit of Good-and-Ill
We dwell within our Eden still !

So large your love, a weaker will
Than mine had left your virtue less.
Keenly I suffer from, but still
Glory in, its excess.
E'en we, perhaps, restraint removed,
The nakedness of life had proved.

O sunshine in the darkest gloom
To know that on the earth there dwells
One woman—you, my darling!—whom
No noblest thought excels:
And that, by valour to resign,
I make you more than ever mine!

Withal, the pang! I deemed how sweet
'Twould be to touch a noble aim,
And then fling fondly at your feet
The fulness of my Fame.
Now—now! I scarce know which is
best—
To strive, or fling me down and rest.

O winter in the dreary land!
O narrowed day! O darkened night!
O loss of all that made me stand
A giant in the Fight!

I dwindle : for I see, and sigh,
A mated bird is more than I !

God bless you, darling ! Even so
God bless your husband ! He, if true
To his sweet trust, to me will grow
Only less dear than you.
Heavens ! should he hurt his tender
charge ?
Why—Hate is hot, where Love is large.

Yes—yes—God bless your wedded lot,
My beautiful !—no—no—not *mine* !
I scarce know what is, what is not—
Only, that I am thine :
Thine — thine — come aught, come all,
amiss.
No time, no Fate can alter *This* !

CLXIX.

You think this a strange business? So do I.
But parents, when they see their costly daughter
For some poor purseless devil fit to die,
Must drive her to the matrimonial slaughter
Before she pines and wastes till none will buy
Who, had she thriven, willingly had bought her.
I have not added to the truth one rap, and
Have but related to you just what happened.

CLXX.

As to the verses, there are rows in families,
And devil is to pay, and no one knows;
And blows are struck as fierce as those at
Ramilies,
And wounds sent home, and all beneath
the rose.
For Man who, science says, the highest mam-
mal is,
Concealeth not his limbs alone with clothes,
But over fouler shames knits leaves like Adam,
The brutes would also cover—if they had 'em.

CLXXI.

Well then, of course, there were a splendid
wedding,

Letters innumerable, many a present ;
The linen was superb, superb the bedding ;
So, what to mention 'chance would be un-
pleasant.

The furniture was all direct from Spedding,
Or some such person, and the flowers from
Cheshunt ;
And—what all proper people like to bias is,
The blessing, by the Bishop of the Diocese.

CLXXII.

Then came the Breakfast, where the toasted Groom,
“ Not only for himself but for his Wife,

Assured each single person in the room

This was the happiest moment of their life :
The happiest . . . proudest . . . moment when . . .
no gloom . . .”

Here he broke down and fiddled with a knife . . .
“ The happiest . . . he might say the most . . .
commanding . . .”

Hear, hear ! The Bride and Groom ! and three
cheers, standing.

CLXXIII.

The speeches uttered, and the breakfast ended,
The bride a moment went upstairs to strip her
Of lace and orange-blossoms, and descended
In robes more calculated to equip her
For Matrimony's journey, now intended.
A faithful servant threw the satin slipper,
And off they went. The women asked for Pekoe,
The men resumed their interrupted clicquot.

CLXXIV.

Then Autumn fired her woods ; and hastening
Winter
Down through the gorges copious torrents
poured ;
Onreddening branch, on crimson spray and splinter
Hurled his tempestuous sleet, that hissed and
roared
Her crackling boughs among, resolved to stint her
Of the fierce pride with which she surged and
soared.
Long baffled, he at last prevailed. And after ?
But naked boles, scorched sward, and steaming
rafter !

CLXXV.

Here will we halt awhile, for many reasons.
One is because the stanza-stringing mood
Hath like the land or sea its tides and seasons ;
The next—a private matter to intrude
Upon the world—I am but one of three sons,
And can't by writing verse secure my food.
Another is—and this perhaps the properer—
I'm going to a Masked Ball at the Opera.

CLXXVI.

Not in costume ; nor e'en, Madame, in domino.
Plain British mufti is the wear for me.
Land of my birth ! I know what men to women
owe,
And—though in Paris—what I owe to *thee* !
I will not mention all, but only some I know ;
The best of which are scissors, matches,
tea,
The Articles which once were Thirty-nine,
And not a single place where one can dine.

CLXXVII.

We were to go to Florence; yet, than Paris
No further have we got—so slow my pen is;
But somehow, when once here, one always
tarries.

Well, never mind; we'll soon be o'er Mount
Cenis,
And then, you know, fair Tuscany not far is.
I won't be tempted to diverge to Venice.
But now for mask, and music, and coranto!
We'll talk of Florence in the coming canto.

END OF CANTO I.

C A N T O I I .



THE

HUMAN TRAGEDY.

CANTO THE SECOND.

I.

WHAT ho ! my dappled Pegasus ! We must
Have one more breather up the sacred hill !
He has not blown his belly out, I trust,
With two deep draughts from that Pierian rill.
Are the girths tight ? the stirrups free from rust ?
What ! stop his corn ? No—let him have his
fill.
Take off that curb : 'tis well for those whom
baffle
His playful tricks—I ride him with a snaffle.

II.

You modern bards approach your muse like snips,
Nor seem to know if sideways or astraddle,
Or whether on your hands, your hams, or hips,
Towards head or tail, you ought to sit your
saddle.

And when once mounted, surges now, now dips
A hand, a leg, as though it were a paddle.
What wonder, if we get from such empirics
But slow blank verse, broken by lilting lyrics.

III.

But as for cheery gallop at full tilt,
Or pleasant canter with an easy rein,
Sharp steady trot over the rhythmic silt
Or plucky leap across an ugly drain—
Most of these tailor poets would be spilled ;
The rest, perhaps, might hold on by the
mane.
If any one on harder riding venture, he
Is called unfitted for the nineteenth century.

IV.

What is this nineteenth century, of which
We hear so much, from which obtain so
little?

Two or three fellows suddenly grown rich :
Two or three fames as suddenly grown brittle :
Domestic fondness waxed to such a pitch—
(Spite of the Word which will not bate a
tittle)

We've only, when we love our spouses less well,
To have them up before Sir Cresswell Cresswell.

V.

Two or three new religions, that at Utah
Successful most, since fitted most for use :
Two or three kinds of silver-plated pewter :
Two or three colours—and as yet but loose :
Some new Reviews by college prig and tutor :
Hair à la Chinois, dinners à la Russe :
Some nice new balms—Columbian, and Mexican ;
Freedom of speech—with a castrated lexicon.

VI.

These are its gifts, I know : but what it
prides

Itself upon the most is, that its vices,
Foul though they be and general, it hides,
And howsoever wicked, always nice is.
Upon its back no parent Epoch rides
As on Æneas' shoulders sire Anchises.
The older Age would gall its tender neck :
Besides—would soil its tunic without speck.

VII.

You miserable humbug ! prude, yet prurient,
Who make a rigid pass-word of Propriety :
Word with a precious deal of “sound and fury”
in’t,
But “signifying nothing” save your fiat he
Must needs obey whose fancy grows esurient
For draughts of that weak sickly cup, Society.
This makes an Age debauched appear a pious :
For me, I better like *antiquas vias*.

VIII.

I said at starting I was sick of strife,
Sick of the charge, the mêlée, and the rout.
But opposition is the salt of life ;
Existence would be savourless, without.
So if you like, here's war unto the knife
With any honest foes who want a bout.
All that I ask is, fight without disguise or
Arms unchivalric. Firstly : raise your vizor !

IX.

Why even at the Bal Masqué yestreen
Whither I told you I was bent on going,
Whene'er a bout was coming off between
Two rival dancers, when the fun was growing
More fast than out of Paris can be seen,
They raised their masks just long enough for
showing
What were the names and claims of each
competitor.
Pattern for Literature—whatever set it her.

X.

Whom do you think I saw there? whom, in
sooth,

But our friend Hubert! gazing on the dances:
And by his side a woman in her youth,
Masked, but as fair as any that in France is.
He called me to his *loge*. To tell the truth,
The fellow rather bored me; so the chance is,
As what he told me I'm about to tell
To you in turn, that you'll be bored as well.

XI.

I know not what you think of him already.
Perhaps you deem him but a worthless fellow:
That loving not so much with heart as head, he
Is but a Don without a Leporello?
I think you wrong him: for it must be said, he
For such loose practices was scarcely mellow.
Younger—he would the matrimonial noose with
her
Have tied; and older—only played the deuce
with her.

xii.

In our departing teens, and even later,
We build beneath a pair of winsome eyes,
That fling from out their depths, as from a crater,
Lava of Love which, though it glorifies
Surrounding life, proves but a desolator.

At last we fly ; but, not one whit more wise,
Return and risk what little's yet possessed
To the same danger which engulfed the rest.

xiii.

Till we have nothing left. But until then,
We love with nought of head, but all of
heart.

We have . . . no money . . . True, but . . . we
are Men !

A year at most—the Universe shall start
To find the race of giants come again.

First in the camp, the senate, or the mart,
Then will we claim the bonnie-eyed believer
In our success, and to our arms receive her.

XIV.

Ah ! I remember, in my boyhood's prime,
A sweet-faced child—God bless her!—whom I
tried

Hard to induce in my deserts and rhyme
To trust, and wait. She would, had she relied,
Have had to wait a devil of a time.

Mefears she loved me : so, thank Heaven ! she
died.

At least she died, or disappeared somehow,
And if she didn't, does it matter, now ?

XV.

Our teens depart, our boyhood slips away,
And comes the soberer time when we have lost
Faith in ourselves and all things, save the sway
Of Beauty, which albeit to our cost,
We worship still, knelt oftener in its ray
That now all else is hardened o'er by frost.
Yet at a distance worship we ; believing
Something divine our homage is receiving :

xvi.

But touching not, since lacking that without
Which this strange world no touching
authorizes.

Hence, oft are lights of loveliness put out
E'en by the very incense that arises ;
And with hands meant to only be devout,
Mars love like this the thing it mostly prizes,
And finds too late—since Time doth nought
resign—
A lonely worshipper, a shattered shrine !

xvii.

Then Faith in Beauty goes—in Self, returns,
But not the Self which deified the boy :
Faith in the cruel pitiless Self which earns
Access of power, or increment of joy ;
Which in the lip that pales, the cheek that burns,
The eye that weeps, welcomes a silly toy ;
With loaded tongue plays Love's unequal game,
And, winning, glories in success of shame.

XVIII.

Hubert had long since passed the earliest stage,

But had as yet not journeyed to the last.

No longer fooled as in a cruder age

When Love appears all potent to forecast
The Future in its talismanic page,

Neither yet, rotten-ripe, had he amassed
That cynic lore which, merging in the Present
All Past, all Future, basks in what is pleasant.

XIX.

He stood mid-way: still young enough to
love,

Yet old enough to know Love's impotence
Against the world's rough sentinels that shove

The pert intruder and his poor pretence,
All unaccredited, from doors above

Which—unsophisticated folks to fence—
Should be inscribed in legible MS.
“No entrance here except on business.”

xx.

What business had Hubert on the premises ?

He loved ? . . He loved ! A pretty story, truly.
Suppose he drew a bill—for this our premiss is—
For . . ninety pounds, would it be honoured
duly ?

Then should he dread the marriage-making
Nemesis

Who, mild at first, doth always prove unruly
To him who once within its precincts ventures
Without the current coin—at least, debentures.

xxi.

He should have gone—you say ?—and bravely
sweated

His brain and body down to golden shekels,
Lied in foul Courts, or duped in alleys fetid,
Have speculated with his name where reek hells
Of gambling — pardon ! — commerce, and have
netted

Enough to make him honoured with his equals.
His labour then had justly claimed its guerdon.
We are not, please you, sir, *all* beasts of burden.

XXII.

What odds ? I know my fiat is heretical,
That gold be not the lode-star of your lives.
All other aims are puerile and poetical,
Baulking the fool who soars for such or
dives ;
And they no less must needs be arithmetical
Who think to have your daughters for their
wives.
Unless they have or heirs be to a title ;
Of course that alters matters, and doth right all.

XXIII.

O parked-in Maidens ! if ye must not love
Unless, emerging from my simple cottage
I abdicate my holding from Above,
And sell my birthright for a mess of pottage,
Grub in the gutter, and be hand and glove
With the vile proletariat of a sot Age,
I need must tell you, though you're *very* nice,
There isn't one of you that's worth the price.

xxiv.

As matters go, you cannot Hubert blame
She was not asked to put upon the shelf
Her troth, and wait until their amorous flame
Had something more to feed on than itself.
Boys and Fools only play such desperate game.
Well then, he should have ta'en, since lacking
pelf,
Himself and love away till he was rid on't:
Perhaps he should; but then you see — he
didn't.

xxv.

And all in all, I doubt if any other
Would better have behaved than this poor wight.
I should not, I am sure; would you, my brother?
Though we both hope to be "upon the Right."
We are your lawful sons, O Eve, my mother!
Though *he* but smelt his apple, did not bite,
Doubtless, you too smelt often, very drouthful,
Before you took at last that fatal mouthful.

XXVI.

His case is very common, though perhaps
More singular in detail than are most:
And these, you see, are buried in the lapse
Of silent gulping Time; whilst I, who boast
To have sucked somewhat from the Muse's
paps,
Sing and save his, like whom indeed a
host
Existed and exist, but unapparent
Escape us, *quia vate sacro carent.*

XXVII.

I dreamed, the other night, that I was Paris.
I had been reading one of the Heroides:
The one to Helen—which the finest far is—
Writ by the heir-apparent of the Troades:
And more wine than one usually carries
Had drunk at Philippe's. Shocking? Yes:—
but so it is.
So that I did the complex shape assume
Of self and Paris and I know not whom.

XXVIII.

In Hyde's unwooded Park, there is a patch
Hemmed in by railings from intrusion's danger,
And whither come not e'en, to rub and scratch,
The mangy sheep belonging to the Ranger.
Achilles' statue, virile beyond match,
Erected by (you doubtless are no stranger
To fact so notable) the ladies only,
Surmounts the spot so sternly-fenced and
lonely.

XXIX.

Sitting upon its pedestal, I gazed
Afar upon the Drive, the Row, the Sewer,
When lo! the ground seemed stirred! (you'll
be amazed
And scarce believe, yet nothing can be truer;)
And stood, equipped, before my vision dazed,
In borrowed plumes, a Saturday Reviewer.
I saw—and so in telling where's the harm?—
A Book of Synonyms beneath his arm.

xxx.

Three Women too. I felt was turning mad
My brain : nor stood on end the hairs that
 roof it,
Only because, that afternoon, they had
 Been cut and washed and plastered down by
 Truefitt.
But straight the messenger my fears forbade.
 “ Cast off all doubt. The Fourth Estate
 approve it :
Decide, and so compose the strife of Mortals ! ”
He said and hied him back to Grub Street
 portals.

xxxI.

My nerves grew fortified. A swift audacity
Rushed on my eyes. I did not shrink from
 noting
The garb of each, the figure, the capacity
 For manly joys and manly aims promoting.
So eager was for triumph their rapacity,
 ’Gan they with gifts to bribe my honest voting,
And I to scheme—so worthy in my eyes
Seemed all—if each could not obtain the prize.

XXXII.

A pretty modest maiden was the first.
Her skirts the marks of 'bus or walking
showed :
Wedding, she'd love me, come the best or
worst :
Of brats we probably should have a load,
But by herself should all of them be nursed.
A rich relation near the Belgrave Road
Was very kind, and when she was not well he
Would doubtless not forget to send her jelly.

XXXIII.

The next was middle-aged and somewhat gray,
But draped in furs and sealskin, none could
scorn her.
Standing fatigued her ; she could only say
A handsome pair were prancing at the Corner.
She had a rotten borough. *En effet,*—
If ill-bred Time of gifts had somewhat shorn
her,
Which Marriage bases its terrestrial pact in,—
She'd not be found by any means exacting.

xxxiv.

Perfect in fashion, feature, form, and fire,
The third was very different from both.
She left the senses nothing to desire,
Offered no children, nor demanded troth.
One fact, I own, a little moved mine ire,
And to give palm to any left me loth :
Though two had been to Harley Street to
College,
There was not one of them that offered Know-
ledge !

xxxv.

When the first two had proffered each her
treasure,
Virtue the one, the other power, then she
The winsome last, all smiling said : “ No leisure
And much of care do those bestow : from me
You shall receive incomparable pleasure,
Somewhat of fame, and all of liberty.”
I was about to rid me of these folk,
And give the prize to—when, ma’am ! I awoke.

XXXVI.

So that, you see, no discord need arise;
I gave no judgment, but retain my apple;
And, if you wish it, will confer the prize
On her who goes the oftenest to chapel.
Only—remember when you screen your eyes,
And with an ugly fact refuse to grapple,
Dancing about it in a craven circuit,
You must not think you crush because you
shirk it.

XXXVII.

No love, save wedded—wedded, save with money.
Behold, in short, the law and all the prophets!
Your summer spend in making wax: your honey
Defer you till the pleasant time shall doff its
Mellifluous bloom: inversion somewhat funny.
E'en so with Love. Partake you must not
of its
Sweet gifts till, pregnant-pursed though barren-
hearted,
The plenitude of passion have departed.

XXXVIII.

It were a vulgar quest to trace minutely
Hubert's behaviour after Mary's marriage.
All I can say is, if he felt acutely
The loss, he did not show it in his carriage,
And if he suffered, suffered very mutely.
This plain avowal nowise need disparage
Her worth or his regret. It does not follow
This globe must tumble in, because 'tis hollow.

XXXIX.

Women appeared to like him more than ever,
Nor can I say he seemed to like them less ;
Although from most he schemed himself to
sever,
Still to fresh cheek, young eye, and unstreaked
tress,
Though self-sufficient, cynic, hard, was never
Without the grace of mannered gentleness.
O danger-fraught ! which ever wins at length—
In winning, wounds—this gentleness of strength !

XL.

Enough. There are, however well collated,
Occasional lacunæ in Life's text,
Which rightly to supply, most highly-rated
Pains-taking pens would find themselves perplexed.

Then, as you know, my books are expurgated
Of all by which the rigid might be vexed.
So for the year succeeding matters recent
Read "*desunt cetera*"—at times, indecent.

XLI.

But when a year in pastimes had been spent
Whose tale — a blank — we well can do without,
And in his barren life a discontent
Began to gestate, till he nursed the doubt
Whether submissive lips and eyelids bent
To a hard will could blot remembrance out,
'Twas then he chanced upon a stately wife,
Who made him halt in his rude charge through life.

XLII.

A wife and mother: woman finely jointed,
Though with a few defects I scarce can
mention,
The which anticipation disappointed
And :—but this subject rather would my pen
shun,
And tell you only of the hair anointed,
The coral ears, the shoulders' sweet declension,
The tantalizing foot, unshrinking een,
And much besides, so sweet since seldom seen.

XLIII.

To have encountered her and passed her by,
To long-formed habit had been change too
rough;
To have besieged or stormed her, but to try
Once more a game of which he'd had enough.
Would she not open friendly gates, too high
For foe to force them? leastways, not
rebuff
One in life's vulgar scrimmage wounded sore,
Who had won often—wished to win no more

XLIV.

Would she not take and heal him with her
eyes ?

And with the incantations of her touch
And movements, O so musical ! make him wise
Who had indeed been foolish over much ?
How strange her smile ! persuasive her replies !
Oft had he dreamed of, never gazed on such.
Might he not love her with a love so quiet,
It ne'er her life should trouble :— would she
try it ?

XLV.

O yes ! for such had been her long ideal,
Her want unsatisfied, unanswered call :
One 'twixt the rude extremes who, grossly real,
Offered her nothing or exacted all,
To love her for Love's simple sake and be all
The soul's desire without the body's thrall,
Whom everything to share yet nought regret with:
Such had she sought and sighed for, never met
with.

XLVI.

And had such really come? And was it he?
Yes! he might love her even as she him.
How strange—how new—how happy, thus to
be
Sitting together in the twilight dim,
Only hands clasped, knee abstinent from knee,
As little carnal as the Seraphim,
With his large concentrated orbs upon her,
And hear his soft voice murmuring “Madonna!”

XLVII.

O gift of gifts! credulity of heart,
Which, duped so oft, would ever be deluded.
Love plays in fresh disguise the self-same part
When of his last disguise the rogue 's denuded:
And we applaud the trick until the smart
Deceit grows dull—as lately I and you did.
What though at last we both behaved so
badly?
I'm game to love another just as madly.

XLVIII.

But theirs, no madness: rather a discovery
Of a new bond ne'er yet to mortals granted,
Which, of the scores who near the truth did
hover, he

Alone had touched—withal this long time
wanted.

This novel science, as became a lover, he
Described in verse and duly to her chanted;
What 'twas not strange *she* should esteem a
jewel;

I don't: and probably 'tis more than you will.

Another face, another form,
Another queenly wife:
Another lull amid the storm
Of a disordered life.

O lady girt about with grace,
Whom all sweet arts attend!
Can I, familiar with thy face,
Want to be—only friend?

Fear not, I place thy love so high,
I never think to touch ;
Who, gazing on the holy sky,
Yearneth to climb and clutch ?

So high, so holy, that my vows
Would not decrease that height,
If only Calm from off thy brows
Descend, like dew at night.

Though fair, how far less fair than thou !
Though worshipped well, less dear ;—
Such have I known. Yet see me now
Vacant and sighing here.

What of those phrenzied follies ? Hush !
Mere memories at most ;
Recalling which a man should blush,
A boy alone would boast.

Loathed as unwelcome lagging guests ;
Crushed as the last year's leaves ;
Unsightly as neglected nests
Under abandoned eaves.

Fevered with slaking passion drought,
I snatch this swift release.
Accurséd conquests ! all they brought
Was triumph—never peace !

Ask not where late my paths have been :
But when fresh storms arise,
Oh ! let me anchor, safe, within
The haven of thine eyes !

I see—were blind if saw I not—
My life is not complete ;
That something bitter in thy lot
Commingles with the sweet.

Madonna dear ; I but aspire
To reconcile the wife,
And like a fond subservient lyre
Accompany thy life.

Forbid it, Heaven, that I should bring
But discord to the strain
Which needs perhaps my simple string
Its music to regain.

Lay but thy holy palm in mine,
Its touch shall teach me how
To love, with love which leaves no line
On the upbraided brow.

Some bond be ours—some tie unguessed—
Some valley of the heart—
Unexplored region of the breast,
Secure from storm and smart.

Stay !—Language spoils the spell of Thought.
Silent alone, we see ;
As when, no more by care distraught,
I, speechless, sit with thee.

XLIX.

But sitting speechless is a dangerous posture :
For something must be done ; and hand and
eye
Will be but busier the more you've lost your
Accustomed tongue. And should you ever try,
You'll find that compact reticence has cost you
Less than long talk, when fondness is to buy.
Another witness to the saying olden,
That speech is silver, but that silence golden.

L.

O sensible Pygmalion ! The laughter
Of all the dunces through successive ages
Found you, still leaves you, and will leave you,
after
Continuous scorn, the wisest of the Sages.
Sure it was well to chase from 'neath your rafter
All fleshly idols with their wants and rages,
And—howsoe'er your meaning fools may garble—
Since you were fain to love, to love in marble.

LI.

Yet where's the use ? Philosopher ! you failed.
Lo ! as you kneel, a something vivifies
The cold blue veins where stillness late prevailed :
 The lids are lifted from the silent eyes :
The brow, the cheek, the neck, the bosom veiled,
 Stirred from within, flush with a warm sur-
prise :
The parted lips glow like a double garnet ;
Your vows are foiled—your statue grows in-
carnate !

LII.

It leaves its stately pedestal : it trips,
Pink, to your side. Pygmalion ! where's your
wisdom ?
Sagely you chose ; but when those pouting lips
 Inquired for yours, no wonder if you kissed
 'em.
So is it ever : thinking to eclipse
 All frailer efforts with a surer system,
You love a handsome woman like a statue ?
She leaves her pedestal, and *will* be at you.

LIII.

And sitting speechless with this new-found
wonder,

It came to pass—I know not whose the fault—
That fingers, tapering pink, went trailing under
Hair that provoked such innocent assault.

Then, brow and cheek are not so far asunder,
Nor cheek from lip, nor — : who knows
where to halt ?

Well, never mind: but prize you woman's
honour,

Pray don't begin by calling her "Madonna."

LIV.

Perhaps some further lines, which Hubert wrote,
Almost before the very ink was dry
Of those I took the liberty to quote,
Will show how false and futile 'tis to try
'Twixt Heaven and Earth, amphibious, to float,
With carnal pinions to attempt the sky.

Just as we think our lofty flight grows quicker, us
Heat overtakes, and down we plop like Icarus.

LV.

The verses, somewhat braggart, seem to hint
Of Fame acquired in those pretentious years.
I half believe that Hubert into print
Had rushed and set some critics by the ears.
Further than that, I think there's nothing in't.
In youth, we fancy that we shake the Spheres
If we but sing; and so perhaps he reckoned:
Wrongly in sooth. But here are lines the
second.

Achieved, at last. The splendid prize
Which still from rise to set of sun
Stirred childhood's fancies, boyhood's sighs,
Youth's active energies, is won :

“Take it;” men say; “it falls to few
To snatch so early in the strife
Fame which, if honestly your due,
Enriches and ennobles Life.

“Take it, remembering withal
Like you 'tis yet but immature;
Much must be fought for, much befall
Ere either it or you endure.”

And am I happy? . . . Happy?—Yes:
But that that makes my life flow o'er
With such redundant happiness,
In much is Fame, is Love in more.

All up the difficult ascent
Were winning voices, playful eyes,
To coax me from my stern intent
And cheat me of my great emprise.

At times I loitered; for my path
Was stony, devious, worse than steep:
And Woman's smile for ever hath
A spell to make ambition sleep.

Yet loiter often as I would,
With these I never loitered long,
But always disillusioned stood
With purpose more severely strong.

So on and ever on I clomb
Until I stood where now I stand;
And, like a traveller glad with home,
Turning survey the journeyed land.

Yet now—how strange!—the travel done,
I seek the bliss in travel scorned;
And Fame's bright eminence, now 'tis won,
Is nought, if not by Love adorned.

O darling! had I known you when
I, sore of breath, did hither pant,
Methinks I, satisfied, had then
Abandoned all ambition's want.

I mount no more : I leave this height ;
Back to those syrens false descend ;
Unless you fling a loving light
Around my pathway to the end.

I mount ; but only mount to you !
Fame is it, sweet ? *I* call it love.
Distinction needless : for the two
ogether beckon—both, above !

And just as skylarks only soar
When Heaven is blue with clear content,
So will I sing my songs no more
Unless Thou be my firmament.

And as abounding rivers run
To reach the deep expectant sea,
So my Life's current, just begun,
Exulting flows to mix with thee.

What lark would feel if having soared
It carolled to a careless cloud ;
What river, if at length it poured
Its waters in a sandy shroud ;

Such, Ocean ! Heaven ! of my soul,
Darling of darlings, feel should I
If, having reached the yearned-for goal,
Thy brow were clouded, heart were dry.

O rapture ! for I know thy face
Will smile whene'er I sing or soar ;
And that, expectant, thine embrace
Waits me on Love's commingling shore.

And so sweet benedictions throng
Round her adored and him who sings ;
For Time shall carry us along
On Love and Fame, co-urgent wings.

LVI.

Co-urgent wings! . . . Those wings are broken
both,
The benedictions clogging like a curse,
The day-dreams 'neath the branches, and the oath
In hay-fields summer-scented, and the verse
From eager lips to ears as little loth,
And all that, still more beautiful though worse,
I have not told you, and I shall not tell,
Haunting their hearts make Memory a Hell!

LVII.

They tried anew a very old experiment,
That never but in one result hath ended ;
Which, as your humour is, may serve for
merriment,
Or text for sermon, and with tears be blended.
For me, I think it but by way of ferry meant ;
Deeming the passions wherewith Life's
attended
Conflicting forces which compel the Soul
To some unseen inevitable goal.

LVIII.

So let us take Life's every motley accident
With cheerful philosophical humility,
Much that is tough, and more that's very
flaccid in't,
Its barren years and months of strange fertility
Thankful for not being more severely taxëd in't,
Not railing at its imposts with scurrility.
Whatever be your notion, I confess it, I
Am not ashamed to serve Divine Necessity.

LIX.

If free yourself, say is your neighbour free ?
And how about the fellow on his flank ?
Well then, suppose that any of the three
Should break the line, what happens to the
rank ?
Control ourselves we cannot, since are we
All in one boat—or rather, in one bank ;
For Life's a bank in which, it must be said,
The liability's not limited.

LX.

But truce to formal argument. The mind,
Whom facts convince not, still will ever be
By reasoning left equally behind.

Yet such will scarcely Hubert blame if he
Just at this very period did find
(As might have happened or to you or me)
That, without any notice, scheme, or care,
he
Was seated, at a dinner, next to Mary.

LXI.

Have you at dinner, fair ones ! the remotest
Connection with the matter then in hand ?
Your judgment, oft infallible, is no test
Whether an entrée should be blessed or
banned ;
Your very presence is a sort of protest
Against the feast, a smiling reprimand,
A hindrance to the earnest and expert—
Could you come in, like children, at dessert ?

LXII.

But 'twas so long since Hubert had beheld
The eyes he never could too oft behold,
That, though he in that mystery excelled
Which raised its founder to a God of old,
Most of its viands curtly were repelled,
Those not refused permitted to grow cold ;
The while, however prudence might forbid it,
he
Fed on her lips and looks with wild avidity.

LXIII.

And when, succeeding to the stately board,
Did music, mingled converse, and the ease
Pleasant of couch or ottoman afford
Longer and sweeter opportunities
For interchange of feeling too long stored,
What wonder e'en with cheerful courtesies
Of talk withal restrained, that tone and
glance
Blended at times a sad significance ?

LXIV.

And when, the evening worn, her curved and
slender

Arm within his, he led her to the portal,
Contact more close and pressure, 'chance more
tender

Than were quite needed, showed her to be
mortal.

And, when within her carriage, did engender
Something forgotten a delay, too short all
For wedded hands that, feigning valediction,
Kept up electric currents with their friction !

LXV.

To say the very least, it was but civil
That he should call when proffered opportunity:
For are not calls and cards the very swivel
Whereon the welfare turns of the community ?
So, I am sure, you readily forgive will
If, like a well-behaved submissive unit, he
Availed him of Society's chief stanchion
To visit Mary at her father's mansion.

LXVI.

Her visits there, I'm told, were pretty frequent.
Without as yet a baby face to fling
A spell round home, 'twas natural and sequent
To haunt the woodlands where herself took wing.
So thither Hubert, just as closed the week, went
To pay respects, and do the proper thing.
Dense drizzle wrapped the pasture, slope, and
shivin,
And smoked the landscape like a horse hard
driven.

LXVII.

The wintry day was waning as he stood,
Sole, on the hearth of that remembered room
Where, in the days abjured, for ill or good,
Had swayed Love's cradle but had closed Love's
tomb.
Was it his fancy, or the windows glued
With blurring mist-drops that compelled the
gloom ?
Bright was the blaze on panel, picture, curtain—
And yet it all seemed different, that's certain.

LXVIII.

At length adown the stair, along the hall,
Approaching swiftly to the unclosed door,
Came sibilating silk, and then the tall,
Slim, sailing form of her, divine, who wore.
“She was not well: would he excuse her
shawl?
She had caught cold the night but one before.
Would he sit down? She sorry was to say,
Saving herself, was every one away.”

LXIX.

Her voice, tone, language—all her manner—
bore
So strange and harsh a contrast, not alone
To fawning gentleness beloved of yore,
But to the sympathizing softness shown,
Meeting and parting, day or two before,
That soon, surprise to irritation grown,
He snapped the frozen converse, and he flung
His heart’s complaint into his eyes and tongue.

LXX.

What had he done ? Had anything occurred ?
Had any crawled with slander-venomed tongue
'Twixt her and him, and with a trivial word
Trailing grave consequence her frankness
stung ?
Something was wrong ? No : nothing : she
averred.

And more he questioned her, the more she clung
To her denial, till the truth dissembled
Rose to her cheeks and to the voice that trembled.

LXXI.

Still she held out, and with the cold pretext
Of ignorance proclaimed her at a loss.
What did he mean ? 'Twas *she* who was perplexed.
How was she altered ? Was she dull ? or
cross ?
The first was possible. She was not *vexed*,
Her word upon it ! Thus, with cruel gloss
Hiding her meaning which his earnest gaze
Strained to decipher through the deepening haze.

LXXII.

Till, as the unkind controversy grew,
He flung the armoury of words aside,
And well aware how powerless to subdue
Man's strength a woman's weakness backed
by pride,
Unto her form nearer and nearer drew,
And spite the head averted, hand denied,
Annulled his vantage and half leaned half knelt
By the fair feet, so obdurate to melt.

LXXIII.

And as in tones made tremulous by truth,
And tender touch that would not be gainsaid,
More potent still, he begged of her for ruth,
For dear remembrance' sake, by all that
made
A holy recollection of their youth,
To tell him all, the face withheld in shade
Crept back to light and half the story told
In the sad teardrops that adown it rolled.

LXXIV.

Incomplete syllables avowed the rest.

She *had* been angry—with herself alone:—
No, not with him, the bravest, truest, best,
Always excepting Him who, all her own,
Merited better than that, unrepressed,
Another—even he—should touch His throne.
She was not blaming; she herself despised;
She had been foolish, weak, because surprised.

LXXV.

But he must think no more to come between
Her and her husband—best of husbands—
by
Even remembrance of what might have
been.

No—no: he must not love her silently;
No—nor behind the unsafe specious screen
Of friendship, interest; she must deny
All homage, all approach; he must transfer
His noble heart, unwisely lent to her.

LXXVI.

He caught the falling word. Unwisely lent !
Oh ! if she did but know ! So wisely given
That it had earned him semblance of content
In the drear days when, from its keeper
driven,
Life had become a kind of banishment.
Had he not held aloof and, silent, striven ?
And now her coldness only had compelled
Words that he had too willingly withheld.

LXXVII.

The unwise strife kept dangerously near
Forms that could never be too far apart ;
Though words might fail to satisfy the ear,
How could such contact to convince the heart ?
Well—she was wrong ; henceforward would she
steer
Her course by calmer and more even chart.
Would he accept her grief for having pained him ?
But—he *must* rise. And yet she half retained him.

LXXVIII.

He knelt so still, so pure, so passionless,
With such a solemn sorrow in his eyes,
She had been worse than woman to repress
Love in this chaste and beautiful disguise.
And when his hand crept slowly to caress
The rich brown hair's unheeded vagrancies,
So frank the gesture, and the stroke so calm,
She turned her lips and kissed his open palm.

LXXIX.

But maid no more as in the simple days
When kiss and contact lacked significance,
She saw in knitting brow, enlarging gaze,
And felt herself, Love's dangerous advance.
“Now, go!” she said; and when with fresh
delays,
He lingered in the Eden of her glance,
Wishful yet impotent to go, she caught
Strength from his weakness, and in words
besought.

LXXX.

“Leave me! Oh! leave me! See, the mists
are creeping,
Denser, around us, and is no one nigh :
You once did love me. Shall you see me weeping
These bitter tears of trouble, yet deny ?
There, brave one! go! Heaven have you in his
keeping
And guard you ever as—O would might I !”
She ceased. He rose. Impassionedly he kissed
Her outstretched hands, and plunged into the
mist !

LXXXI.

One of our glorious bards—the more I ponder,
The less recall I which, we've such a bevy—
Asserts that “distance makes the heart grow
fonder.”

Now, *I* advise you, if your life be heavy
With burden of a woman, get beyond her.
Start off at once for Cariboo or Vevay.
At any rate, irresolute and dawdling
Stand not, I beg :—you only grow more maudlin.

LXXXII.

Try the blue mountains and the lisping lake :
Or shoulder spade and dig for golden gravel :
Either will serve to mitigate your ache ;
For laden breasts the anodyne is travel.
Such the prescription I myself did take
When once I got my feelings in a ravel,
And grew quite well within a distant city
Whose name I cannot mention, more's the pity.

LXXXIII.

But—city best-beloved ! . . I do remember me,
After sweet months of folly but unrest,
A sudden parting came which did dismember
me.
For all I loved, if strangely, yet the best,
Went one way, I another. Fate condemned
her me
Alternate sweet and bitter of my breast :
For I—as it must ever be with such—
Received too little, though she gave too much !

LXXXIV.

That city came with tenderest assistance,
Closed her soft hills around me, as she
smiled,
Shut out the troublous sense of dearth and
distance,
Bade me awhile regard her as her child ;
And with a sweet familiar insistence
Me of my heavy misery half beguiled :
Made me but quite absolved me as her debtor.
Be I forgotten, if I e'er forget her !

LXXXV.

I mean the city—river, garden, villa,—
And not the woman ; she were best forgot.
Sceptics who fancy Adam a gorilla
Question the story of the wife of Lot.
Now whether you the matter of the pillar
And such like miracles believe or not,
I don't advise you to look back in flying :
Some retrospects are very petrifying.

LXXXVI.

For looking back implies regrets: these last
Are useless quite, unless perhaps our sighs
Serve as some poor appendix to the Past,
Completing toils imperfect otherwise.
But sigh who will, my blunders lie amassed
Around so thickly, that what future lies
Before me all too short were to append a
Frank, penitential list of *corrigenda*.

LXXXVII.

So let us blunder on, and trust the Editor,—
The Book of Life's Recording Angel—would,
In the stern sheet of debtor and of creditor,
Find our account a little to the good!
Or that some tender virgin, if he read it
her,
With whom on earth we claimed pure sister-
hood,
Might give us somewhat of her surplus talents
And set to rights our ugly-looking balance.

LXXXVIII.

I can but offer counsel, little doubting
My counsel will be wholly thrown away :
That when you see a pretty woman pouting
At threat of your departure, you will stay.
The more fool you ! When you've foregone your
outing,
She will behave as ill as yesterday.
However—leave, love, bury, or exhume her,
For anything I care, as suits your humour.

LXXXIX.

Only remember, in this Fallen Star
Where all is sprung from and resumes its
dust,
Whether a face, a city, or a spa
Tempts you to linger, leave at last you must ;
And if you will not leave it whilst there are
Regrets, you live to quit it in disgust.
That's sad enough, this infinitely sadder,
And makes your heart as deaf as any adder.

XC.

Is it not better, in the jolting journey
On which Life's tyrant circumstances shoved you,
To have some nook stream-visited and ferny
Where eyes (you deem) that once did smile
above you,
Would still be smiling, if you could but turn ye,
And with the old primeval warmth would love
you,
Though these beside you, so unwisely chosen
Instead of those, are fast asleep or frozen.

XCI.

Delusion all ! We wear each other out.
With self's disease each other we infect.
Each is a perfect circle, fenced about;
And if we more than touch we intersect.
Until—O Love's most miserable rout !—
Whom we adored, we do not e'en respect.
Eve ! who shall blame ? For had you failed
to cull,
Eden ere long had grown uncommon dull.

xcii.

Now, o'er Life's waste, since exiled from the
Garden,

Broodeth a vague but beautiful regret,
A dream of loss, a sighing after pardon.
Besides, is Human Nature in your debt
For simple explanation why, when hard on
Some toy we press, we either never get,
Or if we get it, out of breath and buffeted
We find it not at all the thing we covet.

xciii.

Though pedants sworn to methods syllogistic
May by these stanzas scarcely be convinced,
And readers literal account me mystic
And e'en complain the matter has been minced,
Thinkers there are more rapid and artistic
Will not accuse my Muse of having winced,
But own that, though her method's somewhat
random,
She has quite proved *quod erat demonstrandum*.

XCIV.

The which, if you remember, was that every
Sane man will drop his treasure ere he
think it
A desperate load ; and most of all whenever he
Is tempted by his heavy heart to sink it
In female depths, that waking from his reverie
Of hair-embroidered kerchief, letter, trinket,
And all of which his secret drawer the trough
is,
Will get a passport from the Foreign Office.

XCV.

This Hubert got. We, Member of *et cetera*,
Requested and required whom it concerned
To give upon production of this letter a
Free pass to bearer, whereso'er he turned ;
To speed him without hindrance, trouble, fetter, or
Irksome delay whither his fancy yearned ;
Afford him what protection and indeed
Any and all assistance he might need.

xcvi.

Despite this splendid formula I question
If it concerned a single soul on earth
What place he best had visit or had best
shun.

And as for aught of which he might in dearth
Have felt in travel, why its mere suggestion
Had shown how much the document was
worth.

“ Whom it concerned,” however glad to grant it,
Could scarce have given him the thing he wanted.

xcvii.

The sun was sinking where the sky-line bounded
The blue and all but silent stretch of ocean :
A moment more, was gone—and left confounded
Retreat of Day and Night’s advancing motion ;
Till came the moon asudden, calm and rounded,
As when sole mistress of our heart’s devotion,
And showed the height of heaven’s surprising
arch.

It was in fact the Equinox of March.

XCVIII.

O Night upon the waters ! In the silence
Of all except our heart which beats more
loud,
Sighing to think how late and how awhile hence
We also were and must be of the crowd
We pray th' Invisible which doth beguile
hence
From all we see, to tear away the shroud,
To give us keener sight or cease to beckon !
Then coldly comes the morn and puts the check on.

XCIX.

Why these brief glimpses of a sphere supernal
Which vex the flesh yet leave it all as carnal,
Demoralize our minds for the diurnal
Severe foul tasks within their earthly charnel ?
Hear we the music of a real Eternal,
Or nothing but the fancy-bred and far knell
Such as tossed mariners conceive they hear,
When seas and skies grow treacherously clear ?

C.

Oh ! give us Spirits' wings, or kindly leave us
But clay alone ! or pinions, or repose !
More light ! more light ! we sob with bosoms
grievous,
More light ! more light ! And still it dimmer
grows ;
Save when anon come flashes to reprieve us
From utter dark and aggravate our woes.
Again we wake, again proclaim the Dawn !
The curtain drops, the glimpses are withdrawn.

CI.

We are but banners flapping in the wind ;
Cometh a lull, we droop ; *it* blows—not we ;
The tossing spars some Wreck hath left behind
Upon an ever-oscillating sea,
To which we owe the motions undefined
A fond and nurtured self-sufficiency
Deems self-impelled. How vain ! Upon its
shore,
Wearied, it flings us and we move no more.

CII.

The timid tiny dwellers in the brake
That sing in sunlight and that crouch in
storm,
The very mountain mists that, silent, take,
From wind and crag their pathway, colour,
form,
Not more than we, who arrogantly make
Ourselves Creation's loftiest type and norm,
Are plastic to the strain of place and hour,
The forces of some strong evolving Power.

CIII.

If from this like infirmity the creed
Of universal kinship we may guess,
And so hold fast this little in our need,
We of one Parent Force endure the stress,
Like or unlike, then am I well agreed
To bear my clog of human littleness,
So I may feel exalted by the leaven
Of the still lake and the blue vault of heaven.

CIV.

Ah me! we grope in language for our thought
And find it not, or hurt us if we find.
Our dream of immortality is wrought
In the distempered nightmares of the mind,
Which in this sleep, our Life, most peril-fraught
Set us awalking, credulous, though blind;
Till from some height, to which we dared to
soar,
Headlong we topple down, and dream no more.

CV.

Such were the thoughts careered through
Hubert's mind,
As sleepless on the deck Sleep made his own,
He skirted bay and cape and hills behind,
And in their hollows villages bestrewn
Which, dimly seen, were beautiful divined,
And, since no sooner scarce descried than
flown,
Hold on his heart a fond romantic claim
For ever since. If Life might be the same!

CVI.

But soon there crept a tremor overhead :
Shook free their manes the billows and
uprose :
The sheathéd East more large and crimson
spread,
Like an imperious rosebud when it blows.
Vaulted the Sun, impetuous and red :
The Moon turned deadly pale, fronting her foes ;
Refused, despite accumulating ills,
To share her sway, and died behind her hills.

CVII.

Then from remotest summit to the shore,
And dotted all and everywhere between,
As sped the vessel, frequent more and more,
On bosky slope, in stream-refreshed ravine,
Glistened the marble hamlets : these that bore
Upon the beach, and those in distance seen,
Like maidens dipping white feet i' the spray,
Or dipped and going up the hills away.

CVIII.

'Twas here that after travel, pain, and wrong
Such as the world so skilled is to inflict
Upon the sensitive, a child of Song,
Too much perhaps by his own fancy tricked,
Deemed he had found a shelter from the
strong—
Happy at last—wherein he might depict
The happiness for others he foresaw
When Liberty should be the only Law.

CIX.

Singer who sang too long before the Dawn
By any to be heard save early wakers,
Them who, through sleepless windows o'er the
lawn
Gazing for Day deemed late, are made par-
takers
Of his strange notes so musically drawn :
The Poet of the Future, whom the breakers
Spared not—whom the Mighty Mother snatched
Back to her bosom from a world ill-matched.

CX.

'Tis a sad lie-abed, and sweetest notes
Are thrown away if sung ere rise of sun :
It listens only to the puny throats
Which warble nicely when the day is
done ;
The pretty songsters whose small trill denotes
That moil is over, indolence is won ;
Who, like the drowsy beetle's humming horn,
Are heard in evening twilight, ne'er in morn.

CXI.

True Poets are Precursors, to profess
Faith in a Light that hath as yet not burst.
And if awhile permitted to be less,
To sate with Love's wild honey all their
thirst,
Mere voices be in Love's sweet wilderness,
'Tis that such Singers ever are at first,
Though ultimate witness of the Light above,
Musical reeds shook by the wind of Love !

cxii.

Swiftly he sped past headland, beach and
frith,
And on past Genoa scarcely now the proud,
Till at Livorno's port he touched, wherewith
Her startling resurrection from the shroud
Italia proves; past Pisa, to her kith
Of old so cruel, now so lowly bowed,
Far swifter even than her hare he sped—
For called Firenze, “Come: be comforted!”

cxiii.

The sea-route is the best, except indeed
To those unhappy people whom the billows
Turn inside out, and forthwith set in need
Of cognac, basins, smelling-salts, and pillows,
Or those who braver, by the yerkings speed
Are fain to lean o'er deck like weeping-
willows:
I hate the being jolted o'er Mount Cenis
In diligence that nothing but a den is.

CXIV.

Unless you get the coupé, as did I
When I from all the faces that I knew went ;
The occupants of course were but a tri-
-o, father, daughter, and myself the truant.
Their tongue—the Slave—I speak not ; yet the
shy
Maid and I found each other pretty fluent
In language which, though Johnson, Todd, nor
Smollett own,
Amongst the young is pretty cosmopolitan.

CXV.

The sire—God bless him !—was a rascal surly
Who went to sleep and wrapped him in his hood ;
The girl, an angel, O with teeth so pearly,
And those blue eyes that ne'er can be with-
stood !
And so at last I pressed her temples curly
Near mine, and bade her slumber—if she could.
It is not often that one's cheek a bed is :
Ah me ! I wonder where that bonnie head is.

CXVI.

Lieth it, warm and crimson, on some breast
That loves more truly and more long than mine?
Or are its tresses finally at rest
Under the daisies and the eglantine?
Or aches it, sleepless, with its sighs suppressed
Near to another, now no more divine?
Thinking—who knows?—recalling mountain track
And me who nursed her—“ Could I have *him*
back ! ”

CXVII.

Sweet child! whose budding lips and full-blown eye
I too remember with a touch of pain,
Now that there be who far too near me lie
From whom I once thought to have comfort
ta'en,
Dream no such dreams! More pitiless were I
Than worms that wander through your passive
brain,
Or he your spouse, however cold and slow he—
Spite our kind journey through the pathways
snowy.

CXVIII.

'Tis only on the solitary peaks,
The inaccessible pinnacles though reared
Nighest the sun, that through the summer weeks
The snow defends its banner white and weird.
Whilst down below, where lauwine lauwine seeks,
At least its perfect purity is smeared,
But far too oft melts utterly, to start
On some loose chase.—So is it with the heart.

CXIX.

Why is our contact detriment? O why
In touching do we ever crush or grind
And leave but fragments? If we could but die
In Love's assault! Could soul to soul as-
signed,
Just as they blent, Love's subtle chemistry
Fuse into some one essence more refined,
And sever by invincible revulsion
Souls that, if mixed, make but some foul emul-
sion.

cxxx.

And Hubert strove to get beyond the reach
Of all who e'er had touched him, and escape
Reiterated shocks which mar at each
Fresh blow the spirit's sometime perfect
shape:

Thinking perhaps on unattempted beach
'Neath skies as yet unvisited to drape
With imitative transitory bloom
What never might its pristine hues resume.

cxxi.

Why should he have remained? To bear his
part
In the coarse motley melodrame of Life?
To strut at length the Chremes of the mart,
Or slink, the Marlborough of forensic strife?
In duck-and-drake political to start
From the low bank, where rivalries are rife,
And reach with vigour spent the higher one,
Skimming each question and profound in none?

CXXII.

No. Just as one who, humming to himself
In the thronged streets romantic strain and
rare,
Hearing asudden him who grinds for pelf
On ill-strung chords some popular rude air,
Breaks off, before his delicate and elf-
-like music shall with that coarse organ there
Make discord—So with Hubert; flying far men
he,
Since with their thoughts his never would make
harmony.

CXXIII.

I do not think he blamed the world, and if
He did, must say that I blame *him* in turn.
The easy link of friendship oft grows stiff,
We scarce know why—to shun is not to spurn.
And if some pass their days in tiny skiff
Or spend the summer sunlight sunk in fern,
'Tis that they fear no conflict with the foam,
And find in hills a sense secure of home.

CXXIV.

And e'en in those, whom Nature smooths and
curves
 Best to endure its sameness, doth Society
Inspire at length, like kisses or preserves,
 A nasty sticky sense of sheer satiety.
'Tis a warm bath, prepared for him whose
nerves
 Cold sponge-baths daunt; which, though at
first to try it he
(Seeing its steam) conceives himself intrepid,
At last grows cold, at least confounded tepid.

CXXV.

To Hubert it had more than tepid grown,
 And more than cold: 'twas frozen utterly.
So did he turn him to more genial zone,
 And go to meet the Spring where earth and sky
In their quick transformations seem to own
 Second Creation, which doth vivify
All, saving those whom death or change hath ta'en,
And—full belief in those who yet remain.

cxxxvi.

O Florence ! worshipped Florence ! These of
mine
Perchance sound foolish words : for I do love
Thee and thy name and all that seemeth thine
With a wild fondness. For when *some* did
shove
Me from amongst them, then across the brine
Didst Thou not call ? The pinions of the
dove
I found, most fortunate ; and to thy breast
I flew away and was indeed at rest !

cxxxvii.

So grand and yet so tender, O thou Beauty !
Divine yet human, awful yet so gentle :
As sacred as the altar, but as fruity,
Soothing and soft as its wine sacramental !
Teach me to comprehend that difficult duty,
All to surpass, yet kindly to content all ;
Somewhat to imitate thy large example,
How to be ever great yet never trample !

CXXVIII.

Sweet City ! Though two sisters the most sweet,
I have and cherish, whom the world e'er saw,
One parent left whose piety complete
And self-oblivion set me oft in awe,
Withal in wilderment, my wounded feet
Not even they but Thou alone dost draw !
Ah ! is it strange I turn to Thee from them ?
Thy silence soothes : their gentle words condemn.

CXXIX.

Too eager to subdue my pain, they try
Some well-meant questioning which only pricks
Anew the trouble they would mollify.
And when there come no words of mine to mix
Aloud with theirs, they look and marvel why.
Thou, like a rivulet or crucifix,
In language that doth all vexation lack,
Dost to me talk, yet ask no answer back.

CXXX.

Besides, they love but know not, whilst in Thee
Is love, and knowledge too. Their simple
lives,
The small experience of their purity,
Scarce comprehend how habit's cursëd gyves
So hamper him who tempted fain would fly
That he must needs oft stumble as he strives.
How shall they ever comfort or instruct
Who ne'er the bitter fruit of knowledge plucked ?

CXXXI.

But Florence ! Thou art passing well acquainted
With whatso sins and sorrows did deface
Them who or built or sung or fought or
painted
For thy renown, and leave in thee their trace :
How they aspired and fell and rose and fainted
As clambering to believed-in Dwelling-place
Higher than thine, they failed in execution,
But had from thee completest absolution.

CXXXII.

The fair-faced Raphael, beautiful as child,
Or those his own Madonnas whose mild eyes
Look down from out thy panels, reconciled
To sadness of Divinity's disguise,
E'en he, on whom must Paradise have smiled
'Twixt curtains wide withdrawn, too little wise,
From life he beautified was fully riven
By his own flesh.—Yet, was he not forgiven ?

CXXXIII.

And he, thy Bard, the puritan of Song,
Who penned the new apocalypse wherein
More human truths than to the old belong
May be discerned, behind a veil more thin
Withal obscure ; whose seat thou keep'st from
wrong,
Though in his life didst grudge him and
his kin
That little, striving now to make amend—
He too fell off, oblivious of the end.

CXXXIV.

Comforts it not to know that he, who did
 By verse exalt beyond all rivalry
Of other women her whose sovereign lid
 Was to him as a law, not yet on high,
By her was keenly for transgression chid
 When he, allowed to the high company
Of disembodied spirits in their bliss,
 Felt the sharp words, “Yes ! I am Beatris !”

CXXXV.

Showing him human. Human, as was he,
 That cyclops soul—Jehovah of his art,
As Raphael Christ—whose negligently free
 Grand works seem unconsummated in part
To microscopic vision ; who to Thee
 Also belonged, if not in home, in heart ;
Who o'er that Bard divine did yearn to
 raise
A monument—sole, worthy of his lays !

CXXXVI.

It might not be. And though his feverish
hands

Struck out, in *years* declining not in *heat*,
His own tomb's superstructure, yet it stands
Not o'er his grave : he left it incomplete,
When he went outwards to the Unseen Lands.

Behind the Duomo's altar homage meet
To the unfinished group doth frequent bow :
Postremum Opus : who shall finish, now ?

CXXXVII.

Beneath it an inscription may you read
Which telleth that the Sculptor left it thus
Because the marble, in last hour of need,
Betraying flaw, more art made perilous.
If this be true, 'twere monument indeed
Fit to surmount e'en his sarcophagus !
Since do we ever find our poor material—
And most, at last—faileth our sweep ethereal.

CXXXVIII.

But he was as a tree too prodigal,
That bears and scatters through its startled
leaves
More fruit than e'er can ripen:—some must
fall:
Or hot ferocious dam whose womb outheaves
More whelps than she can suckle, yet for all
Will not relax from any she conceives
Her savage-looking grip, but fiercely hugs
All to her large but overtaskëd dugs!

CXXXIX.

Yet how, at threat of trouble to Thy peace,
That jealous love strong even unto death
Would every fond conception swift release,
San Miniato e'en yet witnesseth.
And if, less happy here, success did cease
To follow as in art, that regal breath,
It is that Genius never should be goaded
To play a blackleg world, whose dice are loaded.

CXL.

Yet in the hurly-burly and the rage
Of desperate defence, the artist's gaze
Did his loved Art perforce awhile engage.
Round Baccio's belfry mattresses to raise,
Lest Time should lose his rightful heritage
And Conflict derogate from rival's praise,
Though *self* forgot, and planning scarp and
mole,
Was worthy thee, thou liberal grand soul !

CXLI.

From these dismantled battlements the eye,
Curious, need wander but a little space,
To Bellosguardo, or to spot more nigh,
To note where he, with nightly upturned
face,
The watcher of the stars, compelled the sky
To yield its secrets : in that ardent chase
Losing the light whereby he made ours more :
No feigned Prometheus, though with fate as sore.

CXLII.

Thou, Florence ! knowest, nor dost blush that he
Who came to give such witness of the Light
Human not fabled martyr, when the glee
Of proud priests smote, flinched in his own
despite.

It is enough for weak mortality
To feel, though fires may scorch and engines
bite,
That “still It moves.” If crushed by rack
and rod—
He gave his sight ! So, still It moves—thank
God !

CXLIII.

Below, within thy city’s chiefest square,
Which hence may be descried, another wise
Unsteady martyr’s soul went out in glare
And murky accusation to the skies :
“ Man apostolic : ” yet who loth to bear
Protracted torture, to his torturers’ lies
Acceded ; but less able to abide
Life’s burning shame, once more recanting, died.

CXLIV.

Some stars there be, astronomers assert—
So high—their light hath reached not yet our
globe.
That for which Galileo suffered hurt
Was light himself had seen and so might probe.
Savonarola wore the martyr's shirt
And gloried in the stake's encaustic robe
For higher light—the Light not yet arrived:
Whereof we pray not to be long deprived.

CXLV.

These were thy children, Florence! all these
bowed
Hard-battling souls—the poet, painter, sage;
And more than these, whose names and wrestlings
crowd
Upon my pen, but must not on my page;
Trusting this much is unto one allowed
Whose utter fall their stumblings do assuage;
Too glad if, in this dark perplexing planet, he
May nourish still some faint hopes of humanity.

CXLVI.

Such thoughts—not mine—were Hubert's as,
caressed

In the soft arms of Florence' curving walls,
He owned that spell, by none save her possessed,
Which stirs yet soothes the gaze and never
palls :

Elusive magic never to be guessed
Of river, cloisters, gardens, hills, and halls,
Temples, piazzas, palaces, to slake
The soul's long thirst, befool the body's ache.

CXLVII.

Is't that elsewhere, 'neath whatsoever sky,
We find but half at most of what we
seek ?

That other homesteads are to satisfy
Our Being's strange antitheses too weak.
Whereas that here the lowly and the high,
The past and present, modern and antique,
The silence of the hills, the hum of life,
Nature and Art, are crowded without strife ?

CXLVIII.

Elsewhere the Present and the Past engage
In duel to the death. Behold where Rome
In the blind dotard jealousy of age,
With pitiless heel stamps on the rotting loam
Which struggles vainly 'gainst her wakeful rage
To let new verdure through ! And so a home
Lasting we cannot find in her, but groan
For spot whose woes shall not enhance our own.

CXLIX.

Where is the Past of Paris ? Kings may strive
To prop or patch the monuments of eld,
And pedants crawling from some learned hive
Buzz "*here* such stood, and *there* was such
beheld ! "

Peace—peace ! The Present only is alive.
Show them your shops, your streets unpa-
ralleled,
Your painted beauties, bonnets "*Oh, si beaux !*"—
The thing is gay but—vulgar. Let us go.

CL.

But witching Florence ? She is old, is young,
Sublime not sad. She will not abdicate
The throne pre-eminent to which the tongue,
The pencil, chisel, pen, of all her great
Death-bidden sons raise her the world among.
Yet doth she welcome with a smile sedate
To her proud halls and paradisal clime
The gifts and tidings of a newer time.

CLI.

'Chance, cities be whose Past is hers beyond ;
But such are ruins or are sepulchres !
Hers is a cradle, and herself the fond
Nurse in whose breast the nutrient milk still
stirs.
Mother too faithful ever to despond,
Within whose womb, though barren deemed
like hers
Whom Blessëd footstep visited, the boy
Precursor Liberty late leaped for joy !

CLII.

Nor to the mouths alone which thou dost
bear,
Florence! restrictest thou thy nutriment.
Thy vigorous maternity can spare
To the poor sickly babes and discontent
Of other lands superabounding fare!
The flow of thy full breast is never spent.
Mother of Poets! foster-nurse too dear
For chiller climes, that bear but cannot rear!

CLIII.

Oh! might I nestle in thy pious lap,
And whilst thine eyes gaze pity on my lot,
Drain from thy healthsome, liberal, large pap
The milk my niggard land affords me not!
With *her* I only sicken, and mayhap
Shall, foundling all unfostered and forgot,
Like other of her children, pine and die,
Or wax a monster to upbraid the sky!

CLIV.

Is it vain fancy to conceive that breath
Of those whose living ligaments were loosed
By flexible claws of surreptitious Death,
Is with the air they wrought in interfused ?
That in such sense each soul inhabiteth
The selfsame spot which once the body used ?
If not, then Florence ! even from thy charnel
Inhale we breath to make our own less carnal.

CLV.

'Twas only thus that Hubert could account
For new and noble stirrings in his breast,
For intermittent bubblings at the fount
Of his existence hitherto unguessed,
Or if divined permitted not to mount :
By clownish custom heavily repressed,
Or by the veto of his crowded Land,
Where such are drained by food's too fierce
demand.

CLVI.

Still, they were intermittent—nothing more ;
But came and went, as circumstance assigned,
And went and came, and so no channel wore
Wherein the trickling tribute of his mind
Its superadded influence could pour.
The thoughts themselves were large but un-
defined,
And did at most but make his conscience swell
With hope that Action yet was possible.

CLVII.

But oftenest his presence might you see,
Ever alone, in corridor and hall,
And mostly there where Venus of the Sea,
Lithe on her white pentelic pedestal,
And pure withal in utter nudity,
Stands, challenging the Story of the Fall.
Wait, souls impatient ! Art will manumit
The bondsman Nature, when the times shall
fit.

CLVIII.

Meanwhile by dotard fables are we fooled ;
Under the shadow of a fancied ban,
In a wild world which waiteth to be ruled,
Stands the self-ostracised poor exile, Man.
Wake from the dreams which, centuries, have
schooled
Your fears to deem a miserable span
All you can claim : and know, *this* side the
grave
That you are Nature's Master, not her slave !

CLIX.

For Time, which garbles all things, hath perplexed
The oldest story by mankind possessed.
If we concede inspired the primal text,
Now, is it nothing but a palimpsest,
And ages have their own conceit annexed.
The gift, the subtle serpent did suggest
Whence evermore Humanity still grieves,
Was not the fruit, believe me, but—the leaves.

CLX.

Hence toy we ever with a feigned Forbidden,
Exaggerated raptures hence forecast,
And deem we can, whilst aught remaineth
hidden,
Repair the foul discovery of the past ;
Till, by our ignorance no longer ridden,
Our knowledge estimate by falls amassed,
Bite each fair fruit from malice, not from
taste,
Detest an Eden, so extend a waste !

CLXI.

In that same palace, the Ufizzi, I
Remember to have marked a virgin lift
Upon a silver salver up on high
The offering of her breasts—no trivial gift.
'Tis Lippo Lippi's picture ; and hard by,
A painter, not by instinct but by shift,
The venal lacquey of this age of ours,
Had for her bosom substituted flowers.

CLXII.

May-be I wrong him, and within his heart
Dwelt a fine humour. 'Twas not that he
shrank
From copying the sacrificial part
So bravely sundered from the tender trunk,
But that, adapting utterance of his art
To times whence all self-sacrifice hath shrunk,
He wished to show, though sin be vast and
various,
That punishment should always be vicarious.

CLXIII.

On oriental alabaster slab
Doth marble Cupid, small but perfect, sleep,
As now quite impotent to shoot or stab.
But see! some poppies tumbled all aheap,
Relaxed in slumber from his infant grab,
With their clandestine drowsy influence steep—
Say, could the artist's choice have been more
proper?—
A lately merry frolicsome grasshopper.

CLXIV.

Before this carven whim would Hubert oft
Stand with a semi-smile within his eyes,
Which, like a sunny gleam that seen aloft
Only a moment lightens but the skies,
Descended not to make the mouth more soft ;
Then through the open window, listless-
wise,
As one who wonders but in vain divines,
Gaze at the sunny, silent Apennines.

CLXV.

For all, with lively concourse and the gay
Prismatic multitude that daily troops
From broad piazza and more narrow way
Along the bank where mountain Arno stoops
To suit the lowly bridges, would he stray,
Glad with the gladness of the shifting
groups ;
And, when the afternoons were long and
sheeny,
Blend with the babble of the sweet Cascine.

CLXVI.

Nor from La Pergola that deftly drapes
With scant material music, dance, and song,
O'er whose frank tiers bend the abounding shapes
Of Tuscan beauty, gracious to the throng,
Whose dark complexions, like their own sweet
grapes,
Flush with the vine-juice warm within and
strong,
Was Hubert absent: feeling form and face
Can lend to life a colour and a grace.

CLXVII.

Further than this he asked not, since of each
Alluring eye and instigating cheek
Did one unseen the influence impeach.
Ah! when we find not that for which we seek,
Orb that dims star or skin that shames the peach
Shine—bloom—for us in vain ! Our gaze
oblique
Glances from off them with a slack rebound,
To plunge at length, erratic, on the ground !

CLXVIII.

Such blindness is a fugitive disease
Which slime of earth at length applied will
cure,
Wherein we women walking see as trees,
And fancy such indifference can endure.
How vain! For Life, through howso slow
degrees,
Must travel forward, by compulsion sure;
Until, however menacing and vast,
We get beyond the shadow of our Past.

CLIX.

But—still within its shadow—did he most
Love, in the pale light of the afternoon
When vespers had been chanted and the host
Of monks had slipped away with slattern shoon
To cell or sacristy, to stalk like ghost
Through dim-lit aisles where none did
importune,
Or in the cloister gardens hard beside
San Marco's shrine or Buonarotti's Bride.

CLXX.

There on the steps of drowsy-plashing fountain
Or time-spurned dial, when the day was
dying,
Shut in from sunset, city, river, mountain,
Alone o'erhead the circling swallows flying,
The very hum of circumambient town ta'en
Away by lofty walls and sanctifying
Sense of sweet sadness, would he sit till sky-light
High up above came down to meet the twilight.

CLXXI.

Around him wandered walk and flower-bed,
And frescoed wall, a little space beyond,
Of open corridor whereon the dead,
With art most humble, beautiful, and fond,
Have writ, through gratitude to him who led
Them, his disciples, never to despond,
In colours not like those of modern trick,
But still aglow, the Life of Domenic.

CLXXII.

Until at times he half began to deem
A rosary would fit his fingers best.
Now that the World appeared a drunken dream,
Why not the sober cloister's tranquil rest ?
Why not, since nothing like itself doth seem,
Doff the poor gauds which Death will soon
divest,
And since 'tis said man nothing but a worm is,
Become a friar, and dispense alkermes ?

CLXXIII.

Then through the Spezieria's courteous gate
Emerging on the outer world, his eye
And heart felt overburthened with the weight
Of the strange streets, vast hills, and vaster sky,
Where all except himself seemed calm and great ;
So would he lean o'er Ponte Nuovo nigh,
Till did the arbitrary tears annul
A scene for that warm heart too beautiful.

CLXXIV.

But with the advent of another year
There came a running murmur through the land
That Future palpitated-for was here,
And End to be accomplished, longtime planned.
In every city pealed the joy-bells clear
For War to light anew her smouldered brand.
Men leaped from lethargy and, as they passed,
Glared in each other's eyes and looked "At last!"

CLXXV.

And women brought their children in the streets,
And held their nestlings to the martial mirth;
Ashamed no more to offer mothers' teats
To those who—late, it seemed—would curse
their birth.
And maidens sent their other souls, their sweets,
Unwed, but proudly tearful in their dearth,
Thinking: Rest childless in your patriot graves;
Or freight our wombs with sons no longer
slaves!

CLXXVI.

For he, the self-crowned Democrat, whose claim
The understanding Peoples have confessed,
Who often fooling, never fooled by Fame,
Endures the purple on a scornful breast,
Had let its long-crouched passion spring in flame
And crackling words whose meaning was well
guessed,
Leaped from the throne where sitteth he
sublime,—
The only Giant of a pigmy time—

CLXXVII.

And thundered for his war-horse. On they came,
He at their head, the braggart plumes of
France.
Nor without cause; for let who will defame,
Thinking by crafty censure to enhance
Their own small glory, never since the name
Of Brother was a password, has the lance
Been laid in rest or war-spurs stuck in steed,
For End more holy or diviner Creed.

CLXXVIII.

But you, my Country ! whose more fortunate
height,

Whilst yet the lower nations lay in gloom,
Was touched by Freedom's glorifying light,

How could you *then*, ungenerous, assume
The mist of chill mistrust, and veil the bright
Hope-prompting halo, given to illume
Whatever hearts be sitting, sick of breath,
In darkness and in shadow worse than death !

CLXXIX.

I do acquit my soul, misguided Land !

Nor will I bate one tittle of my scorn—
No, though a thousand laureates demand

If figs do come of thistle, grapes of thorn.
Bah ! is it then so hard to understand,
When fruit and vintage are no longer borne
Upon their natural stems, that these turned
barren,

We leave the orchard and explore the warren ?

CLXXX.

Notes nobler far, but notes you would not hear,
Struck on a harp, alas ! that Death now
smothers,

Rebuked such craven caution—She, a seer.

And so forsooth you armed, to shield your
mothers,

Wives, daughters, all so honourably dear,
'Gainst him who went to liberate your brothers !
And baulked his aim, which, if it be not whole,
By *you* was halved—the guilt is on *your* soul !

CLXXXI.

Meanwhile, though press and platform should
harangue,

Busy with self and turbulent with fears,
He rode him forth alone with martial clang
That ever bodeth ill to him who hears ;
To drive the bandogs back whose cursed fang
Was fast'ning deeper with their victims' tears,
Spontaneous rushed where Italy made moan,
To give her grandeur or to lose his own.

CLXXXII.

Scared by the mighty name which whilom
hunted
Their foul lean backs, they half relaxed their grip;
She, scrambling to her feet, what spear un-
blunted
Was left her seized, and stanch'd her bleeding
lip;
Donned armour seeming-large for limbs unwonted,
And strode with France to battle, hip to hip!
Whilst Europe coldly prophesied disaster—
“ See the fair slave making a change of master ! ”

CLXXXIII.

Not in the thick of fight, but calmly brave,
The diplomatic matadore, whose skill
The strife provoked, who did so deftly wave
Freedom's bright-hued offensive flag, until
Brute Austria, goaded, rushed upon the glaive,
That she aggressor seemed and every will
Sided with Italy's defensive strife—
Mutely he watched. Grave! give him back to
life!

CLXXXIV.

Joyous with carnage, smurched with battle-smoke,
His great broad breast bestarred with gory
mud,
Hard on his stirrups, certain of his stroke,
Swimming with sabre-sweep through waves of
blood,
Remembering Novara and the yoke
Which crushed his father's soul and curbed the
flood
Of his own youthful hopes, which now reflowed,
The soldier-huntsman thunderously rode.

CLXXXV.

From patient homestead in a sea-swept isle,
Sniffing the sanguine tumult from afar,
Grandly he came, that lion without guile,
That child in heart, that terrible in war !
Through torrent's bed, impervious defile,
Spurning the cumbrous cannon, tumbril, car,
Only with naked blade in naked hand,
Swept with his red shirts through the startled
land !

CLXXXVI.

For he was haunted by the dying eyes
 Of her upon whose breast his own had lain,
And little feet—ne'er seen—that silent-wise,
 Painless themselves to aggravate his pain,
Curling like leaf its stem no more supplies,
 Should from those breasts' sweet shock their
 birth have ta'en.
These two slept one within their sandy grave
 To keep him more inexorably brave.

CLXXXVII.

And Florence, gentle Florence, good to rule,
 Rose from her sunny insolitude,
Feeling that crafty mildness did befool
 Her easy heart to tolerate a brood
Of hireling brows who deem the world a school,
 Themselves the ushers. At her altered mood,
He fled, their Chief. Without or hiss or groan,
 They laughed the discrowned craven from his
 throne.

CLXXXVIII.

Then all the Tuscan youth—like Helen's charmer
Less for Bellona's than for Beauty's joust
In seeming fitted—donned withal their armour,
And followed in the wake the war-dogs loosed.
And Hubert felt the sluggard blood wax warmer
Within his heart, and knew himself traduced
By dastard lethargy and craven sorrow,
And sware to join the banners on the morrow.

CLXXXIX.

He had no mother, sister, maid, to leave,
But friendly faces had been bent on him,
And friendly hands stretched out to make him
grieve
Less for a past which never could be dim.
He his farewells had ta'en; and as the eve
On Florence swooped, was hurrying past the
brim
Of snow-poured Arno in his soldier guise
When on his arm a hand, and—Christ! those
eyes!

CXC.

The eyes of her that held his own in bond
More than frail fingers clutchingly applied,
More than all power on earth or all beyond !
Swiftly she spoke, “ Stay ! whither do you
glide ? ”
With tone and stare more feverish than fond.
“ I go to fight for Italy ! ” he cried,
“ Woman, I love you ! Come not with that face
To plunge me back in indolent disgrace ! ”

CXCI.

“ Hush ! If you ever loved me, prove it now.
I want your aid ; can Italy not wait ?
Or choose — ” she said — “ But Death upon his
brow,
Most cruel, hangs, and I — am desolate.
Strange faces vex him, and I know not how —
But come ! — or go ! Why stand I here to
prate ?
You once were — well : I did believe that Time
Might harden love, not leave you less sublime ! ”

cxii.

Swiftly together through the streets they sped,
Swift to the chamber mounted where he lay,
With all except the calmness of the dead.
“An English face, dear!” did she softly say;
“One you once saw.” Impetuous in his bed
Sir Gilbert started: to his eyes a ray
Of gladness leaped, lending a flush not his.
“An English face? and voice? Thanks—
thanks, for this!”

cxiii.

He was so weak, so agonized by pain,
He could not say articulately more;
But pressure of the hand and look made plain
That Hubert’s coming left his smart less sore.
Then she apart did hurriedly explain
How they had travelled, late, the mountains
o’er,
That day arrived in Florence’ troubled town,
And he by fever straightway stricken down.

CXCIV.

The strangeness of the place did aggravate
His mental ache, and deepen all his fears ;
The sounds without, within domestic prate,
Were somewhat unfamiliar to his ears.
The foreign leeches seemed to hesitate—
Oh ! he would *die* ! And rushed the woman's
tears,
And clenched the woman's hands. These Hubert
pressed,
And whispered low : “Be calm, and hope the best.”

CXCV.

And then he set himself, as best he might,
With hands not quite so gentle as his heart,
Unskilled indeed and all inapposite
For such strange task, to soothe the sufferer's
smart ;
And strove to aid the influence of night
And weariness of travel to impart
Necessity of slumber to the eyes
Of her whose care was too much blent with
sighs.

CXCVI.

At last, unwilling, on a couch hard by,
All robed she lay, and soon was softly sleeping:
Whilst dimmer grew the life within his eyes,
And o'er his brows the death-dews denser
creeping.
The gusty night-winds from the cloud-wracked
sky,
And blackened hills came pitilessly sweeping,
Till Hubert's ears, excited, thought to find
The crash of battle flying on the wind.

CXCVII.

And then as darkness deepened, and the storm
Howled for the Moon that came not, and the
Night
Scowled that she tarried, o'er the prostrate form
Came writhing pains, and agonies to fright,
That give to dying limbs a strength enrome;
The which with gentlest words and roughest
might
Did Hubert strive to soften, smit with fear
Lest yon sound sleeper should awake and hear.

CXCVIII.

Thank Heaven ! that utter weariness and woe
Did keep that trouble from her : still she slept.
Awhile did racking tortures ebb and go,
And he, their victim, with a smile that crept
Dimly about the mouth, his arms did throw
Round that another's, now his own inept,
To draw his body up, and touched that cheek
With lips unmanned and tender, since so weak.

CXCIX.

"Thanks ! more than brother ! but I die to-night :"

He breathed and on his pillow weaker sank.
Colder the limbs, the lips more pinched and white,
Clammy the hands, more wet the hair and lank.
Crept through the casement shadows of the light
Of lagging dawn, cloud-harassed and dank.
Then woke the fair flushed sleeper from repose,
Blaming her eyes that they could ever close.

CC.

Still was he there. And through the doubtful
morn,
Through struggling noon, once more sur-
rendered eve,
Into another night was bravely borne
By hard-pressed obstinate Life that would
not leave
The centre of her citadel though shorn
Of hope that outward succour might relieve :
Until it seemed that Death, of late so eager,
Fell back from lines 'twas useless to beleaguer.

CCI.

Five nights and days they nursed him, Hubert ne'er
Closing his eyes, Sir Gilbert scarcely more ;
Who, fretful, could not for an instant bear
To miss his form, or footstep on the floor—
Claiming attention more from him than her :
Wishful perhaps to screen the pain he bore
From her the weaker, and because the strong
Less-wearied arms made hope appear more long.

CCII.

A week—a puzzling shapeless week—had gone,
And sunshine seemed to venture in the room,
Not through the casement only, but upon
The learnéd brows so lately knit in gloom :
Till the eighth morning, when they came to con-
That fallen face, did one of them assume
Broad look of comfort, speaking low at length
“He yet may live :—’tis an affair of strength.”

CCIII.

His whims grew fewer, and his eyes less wild :
Sleep came at length, a very timid sleep,
Like a hurt friend but lately reconciled
Whom sense of shy estrangement still doth
keep
Somewhat embarrassed, but for all a mild
Well-wishing slumber, kindly if not deep ;
Under whose cov’ring influence might Life
Repair the losses of its recent strife.

CCIV.

As the sick-chamber broadened in the dawn
Of hope deemed set for ever, and the tender
Persistent care could somewhat be withdrawn,
The anxious gaze of her so still and slender
Seemed now upon the patient less to fawn
Than upon him whom Fate in need did
send her,
With look of praise and wonder in her eyes,
Blent with affection fonder for disguise.

CCV.

As day on night, on night as morning crept,
Strength summoned cautious courage to
invade
The cooling veins wherethrough had lately swept
Fever's consuming desolating raid.
And when, the eleventh morn, the leeches stepped,
Wonted, across the threshold and surveyed
The face and form which had so strangely braved
The onset of rude Death, they murmured
“ Saved ! ”

CCVI.

And Sleep, so generous if sensitive,
All anxious now to make a fond amend
For absence long, approaches shy and stiff,
Seeming as though it never could expend
The kept-back love it long had yearned to give,
Nor show itself enough the dear old friend
Of former nights, found even nights too brief
Wherein to bring the sufferer relief.

CCVII.

One morn, the fourth from day on which the
words
Of promised life had life still more promoted,
From soundest sleep he woke : without, the
birds,
Many and musical and swollen-throated,
Lustily carolled ; tinklings of the herds
From slopes unseen fantastically floated,
With sunshine-shadow blended and the sense
Of world come back and Spring's rich influence.

ccviii.

Yes ! Spring had, gracious, bounded down the hills,
Singing her sweet breeze-music to the air,
Enfranchising the buds, the playsome rills
Calling to chase her footsteps, if they dare ;
The sharp-wedged crocus and sly daffodils
Clove through the sod to trip this debonnaire ;
Lark after lark went up for many a verst
To tell to Heaven what Earth had learned the first.

ccix.

“ Hubert ! ” he murmured : but no answer came.
“ Poor fellow ! he is wearied, and at last
Seeks the repose he has such right to claim
Now that, through him, my peril is surpassed.”
He felt within so calmly glow the flame
Of life long flick’ring, and so yearned to cast
His looks without, that, spite his strength’s abasement,
He rose and slowly tottered to the casement.

CCX.

He opened. Just below, the City lay,
The marble, shining city ; but between,
The feathery trees in fresh-assumed array
Of many-shaded but harmonious green.
Seemed air and sky and mountains far away
To swim and sparkle in a perfumed sheen,
And nearer coming to salute his brow
And make him own he ne'er had lived till now.

CCXI.

It was as though the Universe and he
Together had revived ; as though his heart,
Hereto in sooth not over quick to see
The Year's profound emotions, had a part
In her recovered glad tranquillity.
But unto him was solitude a smart :
He could not look alone ; 'twas not *his* fate
To find in Nature friend and intimate.

CCXII.

So he meandered, weak, across the floor
To an adjoining chamber. Nought could be
More sweetly sunny or deserted more.
Through window wide came hummings of the
bee
And liquid linnet trills. By open door
On to another room he passed, to see—
Hubert and Mary, dead to all alarms,
Locked fast in sleep and in each other's arms.

CCXIII.

Shot up a cry from out his inmost soul.
Swift, at the sound, from slumber Hubert burst ;
Released his limbs from the too fond control,
And rudely wakened straightway read the worst.
But she, as deaf as Destiny to dole,
Dropped from his arms in deeper sleep
immersed ;
Whilst he, her lord, looked on with horrid ken
Of one who, dead, had, wronged, come back
again.

CCXIV.

“Could you not,” gasped he faintly, “let me die ?
Was even that escape too much to grant ?
It seems you envied me my life : then why
Baulked you a kind and timely visitant ?
From grave where all unknowing should I lie
You come and drag me, pitiless to plant
This dagger in my flesh ! You might have waited.
I’d heard she loved, but never that you hated !”

CCXV.

He staggered from the spot, too weak to strike,
If human wrong suggested human blow.
But in the body’s weakness, soul alike
Perchance did see that vengeance mends not
woe.
Fool ! will the straightest barrel, blade oblique
Refold her heart to yours ? Ah ! would you
show
How vast your worship, if so frail her vow,
Leave her the only thing she worships, now !

CCXVI.

Alone with her once more, turned Hubert's eyes
To her still form, in trouble and amaze.
Rudely he shook it—"Mary! wake—arise!
Look on me, sweet! The night has gone—
the day's"—
—Peace, Hubert, peace! Insensate are your cries!
She will awake no more; will never gaze
On you with eyes reproachfully or fond—
For she is dreaming in the dim Beyond!

CCXVII.

The strained chord of too long silent lute
True note had stricken—then asudden tore.
The bough had snapped, surrendering its fruit:
A sudden heat had cracked the vase long
frore:
Resisting flower had yielded at the root;
The wave, tide-driven, had broken on the
shore!
Let hearts severe upbraid or gentle praise her,
She found in Love a tranquil Euthanasia.

ccxviii.

In those same rooms the sunshine still doth
fall,

Although her step for evermore hath passed
From muffled floor, her shadow from the wall
Whereon another's, motionless, is cast.

Nor bidden nor denied, he bore the pall,
That took her to the home which is her last,
Even with him, once spouse ; who enters now
With harshly knit, but all unangered brow.

ccxix.

“ Brief words are best. Our lives are fast in Fate.
Perhaps I wronged you : well—you wronged in
turn.

You are avenged ; me none can vindicate :

To strive, it seems, not always is to earn.

Let us go forth together to the great
Duel of Nations. Heaven will discern
Which hath the right to die, the doom to live ;
And if I fall, remember—I forgive ! ”

CCXX.

So where the graves are quietest she lieth,
She who was so unfortunate though fair.
While to the rest full many a footstep hieth,
To her hushed mound none ever doth repair:
But dewy rain and sunny breeze that fieth
Seem to have made it their peculiar care.
As for the twain, I lost them in the rattle
Of maddened tumbrils and the reek of battle.

THE END.



